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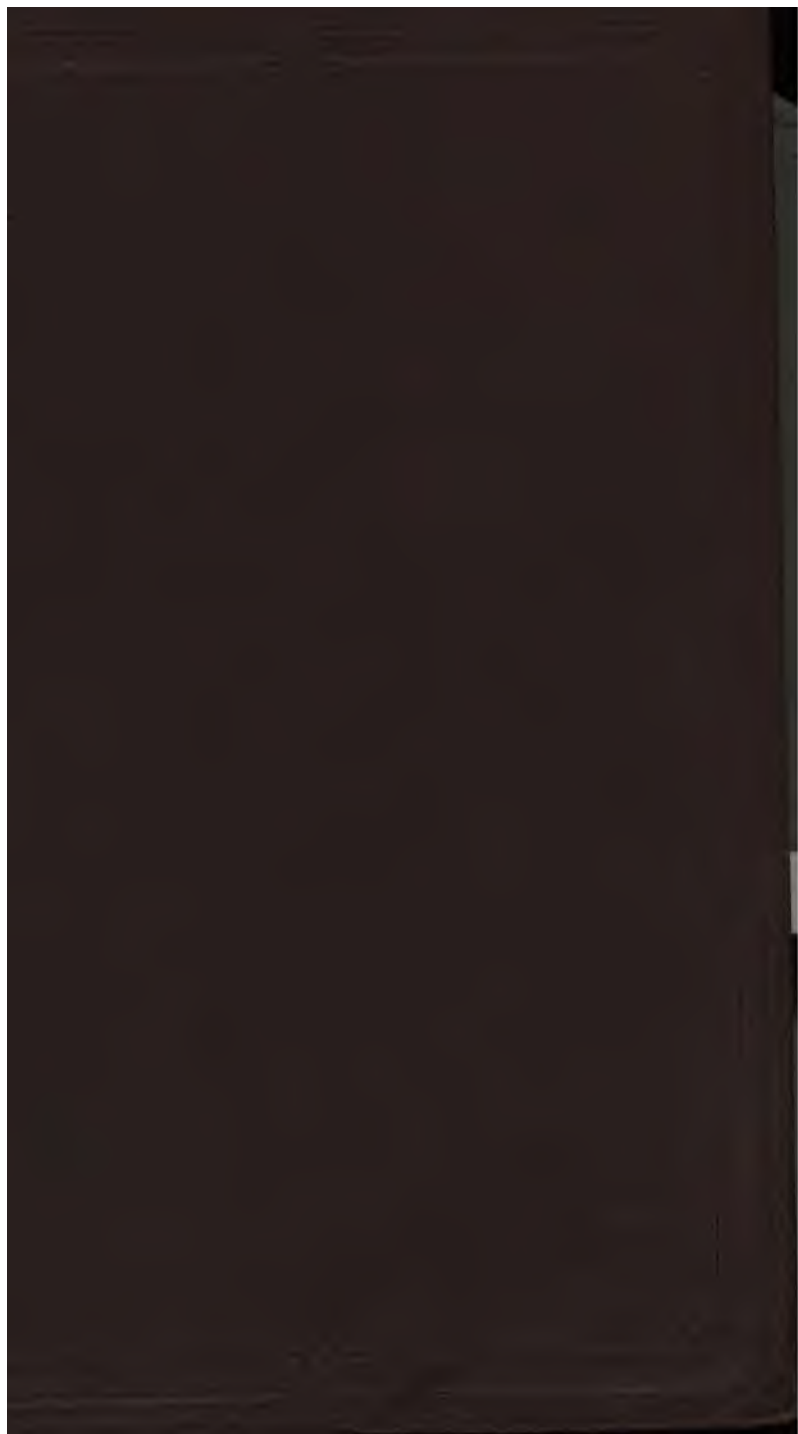
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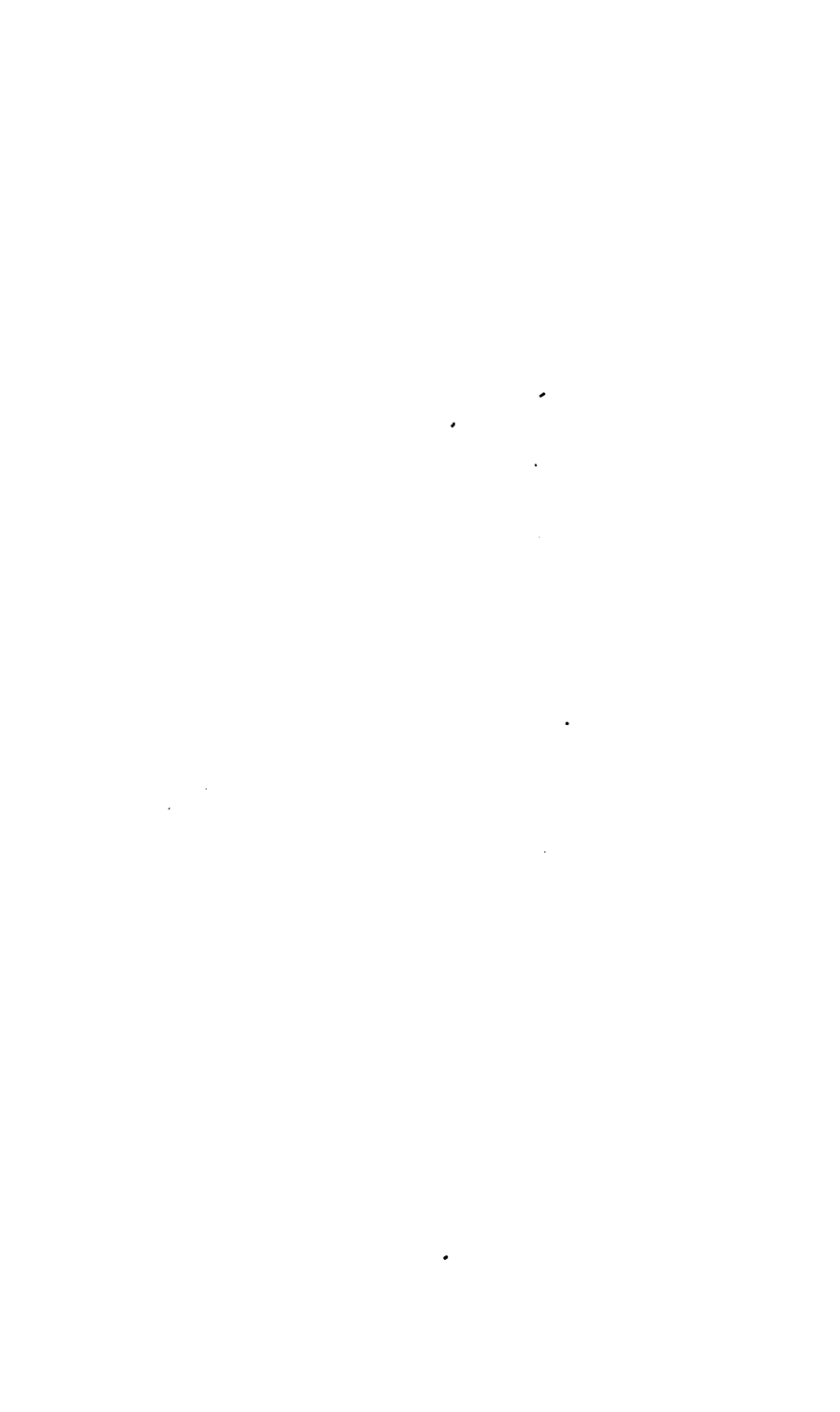


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JOHN - A - DREAMS



JOHN - A - DREAMS

A TALE

BY

JULIAN STURGIS

Page. It is a kind of history.

Sty. Well, we'll see't. Come, madam wife, sit by my side,
And let the world slip : we shall ne'er be younger.

SECOND EDITION



WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS

EDINBURGH AND LONDON

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PART I.

JOHN - A - DREAMS.

CHAPTER I.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF MASTER IRVIE.

A SMALL boy sat on the polished floor of the drawing-room, and his feet dangling in an aimless manner touched the grass border, which lay before the tall French windows. He looked across the row of formal flower-beds, and the broad terrace of level green ; across the park, which sloped slowly away toward the distant river. He saw the blue smoke hang motionless above the unseen village, and the point of light which marked the vane upon the church spire. Beyond was luminous haze, which brooded on the pastures where the stream ran slowly. In this veiled distance the child's fancy was busy, and his dreams moved on to music. Behind him, in the cool shaded room a

lady half-turned from the light was playing the piano. She was interpreting Mozart with much taste, but with a certain ostentation of delicacy. Her head was bent slightly on one side, a tender smile of appreciation was on her lips, and her long slim fingers touched the notes with an excessive grace. Miss Harefel had been a beauty. That drooping head had learned to bend before admiring glances. Exquisites of a later day had turned to look at the willowy figure. Now it was the hand which was famous. Near the musician sat her sister-in-law, Lady Harefel, matron and mistress of the house. She leaned back in the easiest position: there was a world of comfort in her fair round face, and her plump fingers knitted mechanically before her. She delighted in music and knitting. The small boy in the window was also fond of music. He made no sound, and his feet hung listlessly; but one little hand grasped the window-sill with nervous force, and the fingers of the other moved tremulous beside him on the floor. His eyes were wide open and feverishly bright; his face changed every moment, and now and then his eyebrows twitched with a quaint spasmodic movement. Presently Miss Harefel sighed, and allowed her long white hands to fall lightly on her

lap. Her small nephew started up. "Don't stop," he cried; "do go on, aunt Susan, please." His aunt bent slowly forward, and kissed him on the forehead, as he stood flushed and restless by the grand piano.

"Why, Irvine," she said, in a low tone of satisfaction, "your eyes are wet."

"Irvie, dear," said Lady Harefel from her arm-chair, "run away, like a good boy, and play with the other children."

"But I don't want to play," said the child, sharply.

"Don't you wish to please me?"

Master Dale stood shifting his feet.

Lady Harefel nodded sagely at her sister-in-law. "Really, Susan, I do not think it wise to get him into this over-wrought condition. Come, Irvie, be a good boy, and run away."

"But I don't want to."

"But you ought to want to."

"I can't."

"Irvie, don't be naughty," said Lady Harefel, as she put out a motherly arm and drew him to her. "I think you want a dose, my dear. That is why you are naughty."

Her remark suggested a question, which had

puzzled the boy in church on the previous Sunday. He looked at her with big eyes, as he asked, "If I take enough physic, shall I go to heaven?"

Master Dale was in the habit of asking strange questions, but his aunt Ellen never failed to be astounded and embarrassed. She put him a little further off, and stared at him. "You must not ask such shocking things," she said, gravely. "Some day, when you are older, you will understand. Run away and play, there's a dear, and don't ask questions."

"I don't want to," he cried again, with a stamp of the little foot, and the tears brimming over.

"Irvie, when I ask you!"

He almost jumped in his perplexity. Presently he threw his arms round her neck and kissed her passionately. "You will love me, if I do?" he cried.

"Of course, dear," said his aunt, soothingly, and passed a soft hand over his ruffled hair. He kissed her again, and darted through the window.

Lady Harefel looked at Miss Susan, and slowly shook her head. "Is it wise?" she asked.

The other lady sighed and smiled. "Perhaps not," she said; "but it is so sweet to see the play of emotion in his dear little face."

"I tremble for his future," observed the matron, placing her feet on the footstool, and picking up her knitting.

The musician ran her long fingers once more over the keys with a half smile, contemplative, tender, humorous. Then she closed the instrument, picked up a wide straw hat, which was copied from a bewitching picture of Sir Joshua, and threw a becoming shadow on the face, and so passed through the window into the sunlight. The charm of the peaceful afternoon summoned from the past an interesting episode in Miss Harefel's life; and the graceful lady walked up and down the terrace repeating her old phrases, and wooing back her old sensations. At last she awoke to the outer world, and stood still preparing herself to enjoy a picture. She dearly loved the picturesque. Below her in the park, and at no great distance from the house, were two oak-trees, giant twins, neighbours, but not too near, with room to spread their mighty roots and grasp the soil, with strong winds to baffle, that they might knit and knot themselves as they grew, with sun and rain to make them broad and deep. Round these two trees a rustic dance was winding. First came Master Irvine, dancing on and making noiseless

music on a broken stick ; after him, through the slight hollow, Ned Harefel pranced like a young faun ; and last skipped Katharine Adare, a little fairy in the sunlight. Irvie had twined the daisy-chain round her neck ; and the loose ends, as she danced, floated behind her with her floating hair. The soft baby-face was all aglow with pleasure, and the red innocent lips were parted. First round one vast trunk, and then round the other, the children danced in order ; and as the day was passing, their shadows flitted beside them, and the still leaves were moved by a quickening breath of air. Suddenly the little leader caught sight of his aunt watching the play, and stopped abruptly.

“Go on, go on,” cried his followers, looking up at the lady and laughing.

She nodded encouragement, but Irvine would not move.

“What is she looking at ?” asked he, ungraciously, and moved slowly towards the house.

“Irvie,” breathed Miss Harefel, in a persuasive tone ; but at the sound of her voice he moved the faster, ran up the steps at the farther end of the terrace, and dashed into an open window.

Ned returned philosophically to the careful carving of a stick, which he had abandoned at his

cousin's orders; but Katharine, who had been dancing like a little woodland creature, stood looking after Irvine with a most woe-begone expression. She could not understand why he came and went so suddenly, and was so often cross about nothing.

Though Miss Katharine Adare was an honoured guest that evening, and it was the clear duty of Master Irvine Dale to contribute to her amusement, he left the whole task to the son of the house, and did not come to tea. This was a serious matter. His temper was well known to be odd, but his appetite was invariably good. Mrs Parley, the nurse, had no patience with his vagaries; Miss Susan Harefel declared herself distracted; and Lady Harefel protected herself from alarm by remarking frequently that her nephew had gone to the village with the cowman. He had not gone to the village, nor sought the company of the cowman. When he left his playmates, he ran through the house, out on to the front lawn, and straightway into the shrubbery. He had several dens in the thickest parts of this miniature forest. Pushing his way to one of these, he threw himself down with a sense of relief. He felt deeply ill-used, but did not know why. He wished his aunt Susan would let him alone. She made him cross; and it

was wicked to be cross. It was wicked, too, not to love his aunt. He did love his aunt Ellen; but he wanted something more from her. The world seemed a very big, cruel place, and himself a very unfortunate little boy. He derived a gloomy pleasure from his growing hunger. He began to feel cold, and pictured his aunt Ellen's dismay, when she found him dead in the morning. Imagination had gone a little too far. He sat up and looked round nervously. It was already somewhat dark among the bushes, and all the little sounds of leaf and twig were unnaturally loud. He stood up and listened. The thought that his aunts would be frightened by his absence was no longer wholly satisfactory. He felt a glow of sympathy with Lady Harefel, and then a chill again. A dry branch cracked, and the child started and looked quickly round. Then he pushed his way out of the shrubbery, and walked slowly and noiselessly towards the house, with eyes fixed straight before him. Coming near the door, he made a rush, and stood breathless in the lighted hall, just as Miss Partridge, my lady's maid, entered it from the back premises with a jug of hot wine-and-water. Her mistress, who was sleepy, and fancied that she had a chill, had gone comfortably to bed, instead of

dressing for dinner; but her somewhat acid Hebe, who thought it the duty of grown persons in their intercourse with children to be always improving the occasion, stopped when she saw the boy, and shook her head at him with portentous solemnity. "So you have come in at last, Master Irvine," she said; "and time enough, I should think. I do only hope that your poor dear aunt Ellen has not been made dangerously ill by your humours. I hope so, I am sure." And she shook her head again, till the spoon jingled in the tumbler. The child looked at her speechless, with horror in his eyes.

CHAPTER II.

A NIGHT IN THE LIFE OF MASTER IRVIE.

MASTER IRVINE gained little information that evening. His uncle, Sir Joseph, was at dinner in the big dining-room, with a fine air of filling the apartment. "I don't know what to make of the boy," he observed to his sister Susan, as if candour could go no farther. The lady drooped over her soup-plate; and the young delinquent entered.

"So, sir," said Sir Joseph, swallowing his spoonful hastily.

"Is aunt Ellen very ill?" asked the small boy, standing by his large uncle's elbow.

"Ill! of course she is. You are a nice young fellow. Come, be off to bed." And he finished his soup.

"Is she really ill?" whispered Irvine, as his aunt kissed his forehead; but she was thinking of

a passage in her former life, and only answered with a sigh. Little Katharine had gone home long ago, and Ned was fast asleep. Mrs Parley, whose duties as nurse were now almost nominal, took pains to get something nice for the supper of the infant prodigal, and scolded him while he ate it. When he asked about his aunt's health, she bade him not worry, and went off mumbling. So the child went to bed, tired in body but restless in mind. He had not long enjoyed the privacy of a room to himself, and the enjoyment was not unmixed. The room was at the end of a passage, and close to the door was an old flight of wooden steps, which climbed to a mysterious chamber above. This was a pleasant haunt by day, a great place for desert islands and adventures by land and sea, a home of old boxes and moth-eaten tapestries, where the sunlight blinked through a dusty window and winked at a torn picture of Sir Randolph, second baronet, and boon companion of that most dolorous of debauchees, the second Charles. By night this lumber-room was somewhat less exhilarating.

As Irvine went down the passage, he kept his eye on the highest visible steps of the wooden staircase before him. He slipped quickly into his room,

and shut the door tight. He glanced all round, before he placed his candle on the table. He looked fearfully under the bed, and got up ashamed of himself. What would uncle Joseph say if he knew? When he had jumped into bed, then came the worst moment. He had to make a long arm to the candle, and the few seconds between putting out the light and drawing back among the sheets were full of possibilities. That night the darkness was unusually rich in little noises. The old stairs outside creaked, as if strange folk were coming down. Sir Randolph in his torn laces had come out of his frame. Gnomes were playing cards on an old chest, and might not one pop down for an umpire? Wherever the moon glimmered, there was something. If he looked, he might see something; if he moved, he might feel something. He heard a great deal already. He drew the bed-clothes over his ear, and shut his eyes tight, eager for sleep. His window rattled, and his door seemed to shake. He held his breath to listen, not daring to open his eyes. He tried hard to think of everything and everybody, whom he liked best. At last he slept. He had not been asleep long, when he woke with a start, and sat up in bed. Had he been dreaming or had he heard voices? All was

dark save the dull square of the window-blind, and yet he thought that in the moment of waking he had seen through the crack of the door a line of light. Suddenly he remembered his aunt Ellen, and he was sure that somebody had said that she was very ill. He slipped out of bed, and stood cold and breathless on the floor. What if she should die that night? He fell on his knees, a small slip of white in the darkness, and prayed. Perhaps she would die without forgiving him. He felt for a shirt and trousers; then, after a moment's pause, opened the door. He shuddered as he turned his back on the old stairs, and crept down the passage feeling the wall. At last he stood at Lady Harefel's door, and bent his head towards it. In the dead silence he heard his uncle Joseph snore. He did not laugh, but a sudden strong feeling of relief absorbed him, and he dropped on the mat with his eyes full of tears. It was clear that Sir Joseph would not breathe with such tremendous regularity if his wife were dying or dead. Yet the boy did not go back to his bed. It was so far away. It was so good to be near human beings and to hear his comfortable uncle. Besides, his aunt might yet grow worse; and if she did, he should hear the disturbance in the room, and be able to go in.

Perhaps his uncle would sleep so soundly that he would not hear her call for help, and then he, her wicked nephew, would be the one to help her—to save her, to be forgiven. He nestled close against the door, drew himself together for warmth, and in a few minutes was fast asleep.

The next morning Sir Joseph rose very early, after a sound night's rest, that he might see if the men were at work in his model farm. When he had dressed himself, he went back to his wife's room to ask how she was. Having received with satisfaction a good account of that lady, who was only half awake, he opened her door, and all but trod upon his little nephew.

"Dear me! dear me! What on earth—dear me!" he exclaimed.

He looked at Master Irvine with an expression of extreme perplexity and some annoyance. The boy's head was pillowed on one arm, and his young face looked pale in the shaded morning light. Sir Joseph felt, as he had often felt before, that a problem was presented to him which would require his most careful consideration. He experienced a passing pleasure in the thought that he should have something to consider in his study between breakfast and luncheon. When he had made an early

inspection of the Home Farm, and had no justice's business to attend to, he was apt to want a vent for his superfluous energy. As he stood looking down at his problem, the boy stretched himself, turned over, and opened his eyes.

"Oh, uncle Joseph," he cried, jumping up, "is she worse? Are you going for the doctor?"

"Bless the boy! What do you mean?" said his uncle.

"Aunt Ellen!" cried Irvine.

"Your aunt is quite well," said Sir Joseph. "Dear me! dear me!" he added, shaking his head; and then, with the air of one who sees his way out of a difficulty, finished with, "Come, you be off to bed."

"Oh, I am so glad!" cried the boy. "Thanks, uncle Joseph—thanks so much."

"Get off to bed, there's a good boy."

The boy ran off, and Sir Joseph stood staring at his hand, which had been wrung with what seemed to him an absurdly exaggerated demonstration of gratitude.

"I can't make anything of that boy," said Sir Joseph to himself.

The declaration was modest, and he felt that it was praiseworthy. When the farm had been in-

spected and breakfast was done, Sir Joseph, who was fond of meetings, announced a conference in the library. Thither came Lady Harefel, having finished her talk with the housekeeper, and dutifully prepared to listen to matters less important. Thither came Miss Susan from the benevolent but perhaps impolitic occupation of watering plants in the sun. She had been struck by their thirsty looks. Sir Joseph, when the ladies entered, was turning over some books.

"My dear," said he to his wife, "there has never been any insanity in your family? Of course not?"

"Dear me, no!" said Lady Harefel, reproachfully, as if she had been accused of an impropriety.

Thereupon the gentleman told how and where he had found his little nephew that morning. He spoke in his magisterial manner, and patronised some familiar and well-sounding phrases, together with an ancient proverb or two, which generally carried weight. In conclusion, he threw out a suggestion. "Perhaps on the maternal side, eh?" and touched his smooth forehead significantly.

"Poor Carry was excitable and nervous, certainly," said Lady Harefel, and never in my

opinion the right wife for my poor dear brother. You know Joseph, I have often said——”

“Yes, dear, you have,” said the magistrate, who liked to be chief speaker. “I thought there might be something—something on the maternal side, you know.”

“Stuff and nonsense!” remarked Lady Harefel, blandly; “why do you say such horrid things, Joseph?”

“I confess that I cannot make out that boy,” said he, solemnly.

“A strange, complex character,” murmured Miss Susan.

“A dear, good boy,” said Lady Harefel, impatient of subtilty; “but too like his poor mother, full of fancies and feeling. But, dear me! if he has been lying about the house with nothing on but his shirt, he may have caught his death. I will go and see after him at once. A dose taken in time often——”

“No, Ellen; pray let me detain you a few minutes. Very likely you are right, and some medicine taken to-night—— But I am most anxious to settle something about the boy. You think that there is merely an excess of feeling, eh?”

“I should say quite the contrary,” said Miss

Harefel, softly. "To me there seems a want of warm feeling. No one can be fonder of Irvie than I am; and he often pains me by his coldness and hardness to me."

"Dear me! now you mention it, I think that is true. Upon my word, I have never noticed that he showed much affection for me."

"Of course, Irvie is very fond of us all," said Lady Harefel, softly but decidedly; "but," she added, "he has certainly too much feeling."

"Can there be too much feeling?" asked her sister-in-law, as if she expected no answer.

"Susan!" cried Lady Harefel in a tone of rebuke. She considered the question almost improper.

"Well, what is to be done with the boy?" asked Sir Joseph. "I have been looking into some of these books on education, and insanity, and that sort of thing, but I can't find much to the purpose. Irvine appears to me to be really a unique case. It would be far simpler if he were more like other boys; like our Ned, for example."

His wife's kindly face beamed with pleasure. "You can't expect to find many boys like Ned," she said; and added, after a pause, "I have been thinking that it was almost time for Irvie to go to school."

"Why, my dear, that is the very thing," said her husband; "of course it is. School is the thing to take the nonsense out of a fellow." Sir Joseph felt as if he had solved the hardest of problems. He repeated with gusto the sentence about taking the nonsense out of a fellow, and shut up his books.

Miss Harefel only sighed. She felt that another object of interest was about to be taken from her life. She had a keen sense of her neighbours' duty to herself, but had been long resigned to the selfishness of the world.

Thus it became an accepted fact in the family that Irvine Dale should go to school; and the president dismissed the conference with the consoling remark that, "after all, boys will be boys."

CHAPTER III.

IN ARDEN.

'We hoys are all growing up together.
Who shall stay the morning star?'

MORNING after morning awoke in freshness and beauty. There was rain enough to keep the grass green and to quicken the ancient elms. There was enough water in the river, which spread itself in the new light. Wayward it runs beside the Eton playing-fields; wayward but charming, sweeping against the bank, laughing over the shallows, hurrying, pausing, curling back with countless dimples and eddies, but still running swiftly away. It has caught something of the boys' nature—impulsive and wilful, idle and keen, with quick succession of sun and shadow passing over the surface, tender and ashamed of tenderness, loving and mocking, quick to feel and quick to forget, full of little weaknesses but slowly growing in strength.

The summer days, so much alike in beauty, were all unlike to Irvine Dale. Some seemed fresh from Paradise, others not. He fancied himself the sport of a capricious fortune, which his tutor called want of method. One day he was late for everything, mainly occupied with punishments—listless, if not defiant. The next he was brisk and lively, answering many questions, playing with delight, chattering about everything and laughing about nothing. From such agreeable moods a word, almost a look, would hurl him to the depths. He took heedless speeches seriously, saw unkindness where there was but want of thought; and, indeed, was to some extent the earthen pot among the brazen vessels. Boys snub each other with engaging frankness, and forget in a moment. But Dale, even when a small boy, was apt to brood over snubs if given by a friend; and young friends are undeniably quick in rebuking a comrade's conceit. Yet, when Dale had been a year at Eton, after many rubs and buffets, after bruising himself more or less against several unimaginative companions, after days of routine and days of disorder, he was fairly well adapted to his position, and found much enjoyment in a summer of unusual beauty.

One fine morning Sir Joseph came from town to

see his son and nephew, Sir Joseph with well-brushed hat, and frock-coat neatly buttoned across his ample waistcoat; wearing, moreover, an expression of overflowing kindness, which was becoming in one who revisited the haunts of his childhood, and which caused hungry little boys to finger their empty waistcoat-pockets. He was followed by a bevy of ladies: Lady Harefel in a motherly mood; Miss Susan recalling the touching lines about "the little victims regardless of their doom;" Mrs Adare, languid, gentle, beautifully dressed; and by her side, subdued for once into a strange quiet by the neighbourhood of so many boys, the bright-eyed Katharine. Sir Joseph, relieved from many commissions and legislative duties, expanded like a rose. He nodded into shops, where he had been long forgotten; hailed an ancient wheeler of tarts, who pretended to remember his father; remarked on passing boys in a genial tone, which inspired those young gentlemen with contempt, and made his nephew Irvine quiver. The boy was much excited, and only happy by fits and starts. To submit so many female friends to the criticism of school-fellows was embarrassing, and it was difficult to prevent his uncle from outspoken admiration even of the greatest swells. If

his comments on the captain of the boats should reach the ears of that official, what might not happen? When the party were at last gathered safely in Harefel's room, which was filled in every corner, Dale breathed more freely. They admired everything: the ingenious bed, which disguised itself by day; the "sock" cupboard, which held the battered teapot, the cups and saucers, the knives not dangerously sharp, some jam-pots, half a stale cake, an odd skate, and a hammer; the engravings of dogs, each bearing in its mouth an appropriate bird; the small square looking-glass, with which its nail would rise higher and higher with its master's growth; the almanac for the half, enlivened by red-lettered holidays; the deal-table carved by successive amateurs ambitious of preserving their names, but modestly covered with a cloth of gay colours subdued by ink. The chief ornament of the room, as of every other boy's room, was the bureau, which was kept studiously neat by Harefel, and displayed with pride. He explained to his admiring mother the advantage of having a chest of drawers, a desk, and a bookcase all in one. He regretted that the upper or book-portion, however carefully locked, was not proof against a skilfully-inserted knife. He pointed out the pigeon-holes in

the desk, and the little drawers, which seemed to invite the accumulation of string and nails, broken knife-blades, and other curiosities. Lady Harefel glanced round upon her friends, as who would say, "Am I not a blessed woman? Was ever any other boy so sensible, so affectionate, so good?" After a pause, in which, perhaps, she gave thanks silently for the great blessing of her life, she remembered her nephew, and said, "We must see Irvie's room, too." Dale blushed.

"You come alone, aunt Ellen," he whispered.

Mrs Adare and her daughter, guided by Sir Joseph, who was proud of his knowledge of the houses, and brimful with local anecdote, had gone in quest of other boys who "knew them at home." Miss Harefel, who was pensively regarding the passing youth, began to question her nephew Ned, and to ignore his answers. So Dale was able to hurry off his aunt Ellen unobserved. In the dark wooden passage he confided to her that he had meant to tidy his room, but had forgotten, and that he could not bear to show it to anybody but her. She began a motherly lecture, while he drew her along, and got her safely into his den.

"You must not try the Windsor-chair," he said, "it has got something the matter with it."

He looked guiltily from his aunt to his bureau. The door of the bookcase had swung open, and the lock was gone. Across the sloping lid of the desk were the four letters of his name, marked boldly with a red-hot poker. There was another name written across the leaves of the "short" Ovid, which lay coverless on the table. A lonely picture hung crooked above the fireplace, and the looking-glass had been adorned with an unfading face by the clever manipulation of the quicksilver at its back. Amid the general confusion of grammars, dictionaries, and classic poets, were a few books which were more kindly treated, — Campbell's poems, a volume of Rousseau, a first manual of logic—strange works for the library of an Eton lower boy.

"Aunt Ellen," said Irvine, presently, standing very close to her, and moving uneasily, "are you my people?"

"What, dear?" asked the lady.

"My people. I mean, when other fellows talk about their people, they mean their fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters; and I thought——"

"Of course we are your people, dear," said his aunt, smoothing his hair with her soft motherly

hand; "you know you are like a son to us, Irvie."

"Really?" cried he.

She kissed him gently for answer. She was sitting in his wooden chair, more strong than comfortable. The boy threw himself down by her feet, and leaned against her. The air stealing through the open window seemed a caress. He closed his eyes, that the tears might not fall, and felt that the whole world was full of love and tenderness for him. Meanwhile his good aunt, with hand resting on his shoulder, wondered why he was not more like other boys. She was so glad that her own Teddie was not so fanciful. She thought of her poor dead brother, and sighed over his imprudent marriage. How lucky it was that she was left to be a mother to his only child! How like he was to his own mother, that nervous, excitable woman, who had died when he was born! Poor boy! Perhaps he was not so strong as he seemed. She would speak to his tutor's wife about a tonic, or some port wine. Sir Joseph had some excellent old port. Thus peacefully musing, aunt and nephew sat together in the untidy little room, until the worthy baronet burst in upon them, somewhat flurried and alarmed about the train. Irvine suf-

ferred at the station. He did not like being kissed before the porters, nor being tipped before the guard, who was respectfully interested in the operation. He said good-bye shyly to Miss Katharine, who was shy too; he heard his aunt Susan murmur something about a pretty picture, and was full of resentment. Finally, after alternate warnings and embraces of Lady Harefel, many shiftings of windows and rugs to suit the precise state of Mrs Adare's constitution, and some hindrance caused by Miss Susan's assistance, the party were packed into a carriage, and the train started. Irvine felt a load of responsibility lifted from his young shoulders, even while he secretly brushed away a tear. His cousin Ned, regardless of bystanders, was waving his handkerchief to Miss Katharine, whose hair of ruffled gold could still be seen at the window.

"Isn't she awfully pretty?" asked he, with warmth.

"Is she?" said Irvine, absently. He was thinking that if aunt Ellen was to be a mother to him, he might look on the bright, popular Harefel as a brother, and the thought was very pleasant. He did not extend the argument to his uncle, for he was sure that he could not regard him as a father. Yet he feared that it was very wrong not to be

fonder of Sir Joseph. He had been taught from the cradle that it was his duty to love his relations, but it seemed very hard to love anybody because he ought. This was one of the difficulties which often puzzled the young person.

"Come away," he said, impatiently; and Harefel walked down town beside him, recalling the events of the day with eagerness and laughter.

The summer half seems endless to young boys. The days grow longer, and are full of important events. Now and again one is distinguished by a great race or good match. On one delightful afternoon Harefel lay on his rug in the playing-fields, eating cherries, which he had purchased from a stout and kindly dame. Dale was kneeling beside him, to get a better look at the batsman, who was at their tutor's.

"Do you think he will get into the eleven?" he asked, not for the first time.

"Not this year. He is too young," said Harefel, with authority.

"I hope he will."

"I don't think he cares much. He is a cool fellow." This was said with much admiration.

As Dale was kneeling, came a friend, stepping softly, and pushed him suddenly forward on to his

nose. The prostrate youth turned round fiercely, and then burst out laughing. It was very hard to be angry with Aubrey. Leonard Aubrey was a boy of excessive vitality. His features tended upward, his eyebrows ran up towards his hair, on the top of his head was a dancing feather of hair which defied the brush. Driven by a gadfly into perpetual motion, he was always in mischief when he had nothing better to do, and was always laughing when he was not talking. After a gallant attempt to drag away the rug, he was persuaded to take a place on it. He disposed of Kerisen's chance of the eleven, predicted that he would not get in for another two years, laughed at his indifference and mimicked his manner, stole Harefel's cherries, dropped a dry cherry-stone down Dale's neck, and having made the place too hot to hold him, went off to visit the next rug. He had friends all round the ground, friends who forgave much.

Even after tea-time, the day was not yet old. The grass was still warm at Cuckoo Weir, when the young cousins pulled off their clothes and jumped into the cool water. The bank was full of life, and the air of laughter. Boys, in rowing-clothes, in black jackets, in every stage of undress, swarmed on the shore. Friends ducked each other,

and the somewhat sombre stream was beaten bright by splashing. Small, naked forms dashed across the green, or flung themselves headlong into the water. Little people sat thick upon the steps, with their knees drawn up to their chins. There was calling of names, shouts, screams, laughter. To be free of one's clothes after a slow summer day, is a pure ecstasy. It is to return to the childhood of the world. Dale was in the wildest spirits, and Harefel very jolly.

When they had come out of the water, dried themselves by rubbing and running, and got into their clothes, they walked beside the little stream to the wider river. Far off the slanting sunlight gilded the dark trees which shade the locks, and more nearly touched the figure of a lonely bather at Athens. Boys, in every sort of boat, were passing down the stream; some toiling earnestly in practice for a race, some loitering and lolling at their ease. Young voices, shrilly warning or lightly mocking, made the evening air more pleasant. As the two friends turned back towards the Brocas, the great castle seemed doubly great in the declining day, its greyness warmed to rose, while the red roofs, which throng upward to its base, were already half in shadow. "How beautiful!" whis-

pered Dale, with a long breath, as he pressed Harefel's arm. "Yes; isn't it jolly?" assented the other.

The elder boy walked on in silence. He felt half sad, as this long day faded slowly away in beauty. The light, which slanted across Brocas clump, only darkened the shadows among the great deep-bosomed trees. Not far off, the rafts were gleaming; crews were disembarking, boats being run up; all was hurry and bustle. Dale laid his hand on his friend's arm, and said, "It is so jolly to have you for a cousin." Harefel smiled pleasantly for answer. He was very fond of Dale, though he sometimes thought it a pity that he was "such an awfully odd sort of fellow."

CHAPTER IV.

THE LIBRARY ROW AT MURRAY'S.

THE growth of an Eton boy is marked by many small events. He changes his "sock"-shop or eating-house, passing from the modest patty at the wall to the snug home of the early bun and coffee; thence through a well-known shop, kitchen, and back-room; until, a full-blown swell, he saunters into a sanctum where, over the neatly-cut sandwich, matches are arranged and crews formed. He gets into the boats or into Upper Club, perhaps into the Society. But the most marked epoch in his career is going into tails. At the time of the great library row at Murray's, Dale had donned his tailed coat and tied his white tie, took an occasional breakfast in that secluded kitchen, had long ceased to fag, was a fair cricketer, and in his own eyes a person of some importance, and, moreover, with duties to

perform. He was a half-grown rebel. He neglected the school-work because it was appointed by authority. He laid hands eagerly on all books and pamphlets which gave him reasons for insubordination. He was not aware how great among the causes of his passion for liberty was self-assertion. The big fellows in the house had shown a disposition to snub him. In moments of confidence, this bold thinker poured out his aspirations to his cousin, who was not a little impressed. It was indeed wonderful to hear a fellow not much more than a year older than himself quote specimens of Parisian rhetoric, and rival them in his native tongue. It was an awful thing to speak slightly of the weak moderation of Lafayette, whom Harefel knew to be somebody connected with revolutions. Of course, people may say things in French which could not be endured in a more wholly intelligible language ; but that was a fearful saying about property and theft, which even Dale himself uttered nervously. Harefel was convinced that his cousin was awfully clever, although he had been switched for idleness. He listened with due deference when the rebel, descending from vague dreams to a particular grievance, poured forth a flood of eloquence against Rule V. of the new library rules. He gravely repeated

the zealot's phrases to his friends. Their eyes were opened to injustice, and they scented a row. It was a perilous time. Slowly the discontent spread through the house. Aubrey was the first to be fired, and straightway went mad with delight. Like a petrel, he flitted across the stormy waters. He danced round Dale, caught his pet phrases, mixed them wildly with the last new slang and terms of his own invention, set them to the last new comic tune, and sang them in the passages. Dale would have called him Camille, if it had not so affected a sound. It was a perilous time. There was an ominous stillness in the air. Lower boys came sluggishly to the call; were even heard to murmur. Bread was incompletely toasted, and rebuke met with an affectation of indifference. Lampoons appeared on the walls of the passage. It was the pause before the storm. A crisis was at hand.

The library, in which the obnoxious rules were hung, was deserted by all but the few oldest boys. There sat Kerisen in his peculiar chair, and cared not a jot for the coming commotion. "Must we have a row?" he asked, with a weary smile.

"Let us lick them all round, and get it over," suggested Loyd, a fair-haired, deep-chested young giant, who rowed 5 in the eight.

"You must do it, if it comes to that. It is all your pig-headed old rule. I put it as mildly as I could for you."

Loyd grinned at his friend, whom he vastly admired. The big, active athlete, whose keenest pleasure was found in a long row and a pot of beer, had been early impressed by that air of weariness of the world, which is still rare among gentlemen in their teens. Kerisen liked to be Captain of the House, but was bored by the dignity. Greatness had been thrust upon him. It was troublesome to rule, and the governed must be made aware of the fact. He was a graceful scholar, who sneered at scholarship; a pretty cricketer, who seemed to neglect his cricket; a wit, who was sickened by the repetition of his sayings. He did all things well, because he could not help it.

"The House is awfully quiet to-night," remarked Loyd, after a pause.

"There is some mischief brewing," said Kerisen, turning his paper. In a moment he looked up comically at his friend. The unusual silence was at an end. There was a sound of many steps upon the wooden stairs, a buzz of voices, a bustle in the passage. Presently the door was pushed open, and Dale appeared, supported by Harefel and Aubrey,

and followed by the greater part of the House. Some lads, of a discretion beyond their years, remained quiet in their rooms. Four or five, who belonged to the older set, made haste to join the Captain by the fire. The two parties were face to face. There was a pause full of awe. To everybody, except Kerisen himself, a protest against his authority was a very grave matter. Dale was flushed and nervous, and the hand which held his papers trembled. He had consented to speak, and had spent much time in deciding what he should say, and how he should say it. He had looked out passages in his favourite authors, and rehearsed some telling sentences of his own. He was determined that the good cause should not suffer from his advocacy: he was not without hope that his first effort as an orator would be a conspicuous success. He had the making of a great speech in his head, and he remembered Barbaroux. He had decided that he would begin with the simple word "Gentlemen;" but as he was on the point of opening his lips, Kerisen turned on him a glance in which amusement and weariness were so strangely blended, that the orator faltered. Harefel, who disapproved of the whole thing, but could not bear to see his cousin fail, pressed his arm for encourage-

ment; Aubrey, who was burning for a row, called out, "Speak up, old man;" and Dale, fired anew by the ostentatious scorn of Loyd, who was leaning against the mantelpiece with his chest stuck out, and his back to the obnoxious rules, plunged head-long into his subject.

Instead of the premeditated commencement, he stumbled into his speech with the words, "Look here, you know;" and the great oration, which was to have been, only turned up in fragments among some rather commonplace expressions. "Look here, you know," he said, "I—I mean these fellows want me to say something about these new library rules. We don't like Rule V." Here he paused to collect his ideas, and Loyd laughed. "And we won't have Rule V.," cried the orator, hotly. At this display of warmth his supporters cheered, and he went on more glibly. "We don't see what right one fellow, or two fellows, or six fellows, have to make rules which are binding on all. No rule should be binding which is not carried by a majority of the House, and—and we ought to elect the library committee. That's what we think."

"Bravo!" shouted Aubrey, and the small boys cheered. Thereupon the orator felt a glow, and, as some fine phrases came back to him, he rose to a

higher level. "It is all contrary to the rights of Englishmen—to the rights of Man."

"The rights of Boy," suggested Kerisen, politely.

"Well? And why should not we have our rights? If we are to be free at twenty-one, are we to be slaves at twenty? It is the principle I care for. You six fellows make yourselves a government, and make laws for the library, which belongs to us all. It is a gross violation of liberty, of all which makes this country great and this school great—yes, it is. It is a violation of the—of the——oh yes, Kerisen, it is all very well for you to sneer. We all know that you don't care about it, or about anything else. I will be personal. Do you think that I am afraid of your Rule V., of being 'kept in order by any means which seem good to any member of the library committee'?" He paused for breath, and there was a hum of applause. "We won't be bullied. We won't be sat upon by any great big muscular——oh, I am not afraid, Loyd. Hit me, and show what tyranny is. There will come a day when liberty shall be no longer a name in this place, but a glorious reality."

"Every boy his own master," observed Kerisen, as the demagogue halted in his speech.

"Yes, there will. In spite of any languid despot—I don't care, Harefel. I will tell these fellows what I think. I won't be silenced."

"Come, come," said the Captain, quietly, "tell us what you want, and don't jaw about it." He yawned, and turned again to his paper.

"I want," said the orator, rather dashed by the despot's coolness—"I want the library committee chosen by the whole House. And I say that those rules must be taken down, because they were made by you, and nobody elected you."

Loyd had been growing very angry during the progress of this speech. This method of demanding change seemed to him a monstrous novelty, and full of unimagined perils. He had a great respect for order, and none for rhetoric. That fellows in fifth form should head a rebellion of lower boys was bad enough; that one of them should make a speech was unpardonable. He could more easily forgive the personal allusion to his muscles, of which he was somewhat proud, than this spouting, which seemed to fill the library with the atmosphere of a demagogue's tavern. At one point of the oration he had stepped forward with the half-formed purpose of stopping the speaker's mouth by flinging him out of window; but Keri-

sen had checked him by touching him with the foot which he was lazily swinging. Nevertheless, Loyd could not imitate his friend's coolness; and feeling that his power lay rather in deeds than words, he broke the pause which followed Dale's speech by the short question, "Who's going to take down the rules?" He planted his back against the paper, squared his shoulders, and shook his head like a bull. Dale made a short step forward, trembling with excitement, and with nerves shaken by the animal strength before him. As he hesitated, Aubrey and Harefel both sprang forward. The former in his eagerness fell over Kerisen's leg, which was languidly, but perhaps intentionally, obtruded. The latter, who fervently wished that the row was over, but who would not have his cousin's courage doubted, stepped forward, flushed but resolute, and stretching his arm up over Loyd's shoulder, laid his hand on the paper of rules. As he did so, the big fellow struck him with his open hand a sounding blow on the side of the head. The boy went headlong over a chair, tearing down the rules as he fell. There was a shout of triumph, and a cry of "Shame!" In an instant Dale had darted forward like a tiger, and struck Loyd with all his force on the cheek. The fist glanced off

without much effect, and the assaulted athlete touched the place with a comical expression of astonishment. Then he strode forward towards his opponent, who faced him fiercely with wild eyes and trembling limbs. Then he stopped, looked at Dale curiously, and then he burst out laughing. There was a murmur of applause from the lower boys. After all, he was a hero, a real swell. Kersen took advantage of the moment. Rising with easy grace, as if to be rid of a tedious business, he laid his hand on his friend's big shoulder, and said, "Don't let us have a row in the House. You fellows don't mean any harm. No doubt, you will all be Captains of the House some day, and a horrid bore you will find it." Here there was a general laugh, which proved the crisis over. "As to these rules," the Captain went on, with a faint smile, "you had better leave the management of the library to us, who know all about it. It is no great pleasure. If this will suit you, we will abolish Rule V." This statement was received with general applause. An exclamation of Loyd was checked by the pressure of the hand on his shoulder. Dale was sitting in a chair very pale, and unable to speak. The majority, who were not quite clear about the right of suffrage, believed that

they had got all which they wanted. The Captain knew that order could be enforced without a written statement that it would be. All parties appeared satisfied, and the great library row was at an end. When the boys talked it over afterwards, most of them agreed that Dale had made a mess of the affair, and that it was doubtful whether even a member of Parliament would have spoken better than Kerisen.

As Dale was sitting weary and dispirited in his room on the day following the crisis, his cousin came in, bright and happy. It often seemed to Dale that Harefel brought with him sunlight and pleasant thoughts.

"Old Loyd has been so awfully jolly," he said; "he came and begged my pardon about yesterday."

"It was very good of him not to kill me," said Irvine, gloomily.

"He told me to tell you that he takes a licking," said Ned, laughing. "I am glad it is all well over. Loyd says that the House must pull together; and I think he is right. Don't you?"

Dale made no answer, but looked up with a faint smile, remembering Sir Joseph's trust in phrases. Harefel had something more to say—something which was hard to express. He stood awkwardly,

and looked away from his cousin. He put his hand in his pocket, and took it out. He pulled a cap off the door, and hung it up again. Then he cleared his throat, and swinging round suddenly, laid his hands on Dale's shoulders, and looked down into his face.

"I want to say, old fellow, that I shall never forget how you stood up for me."

Dale was strangely moved. He looked up at his cousin with swimming eyes.

"I would do anything in the world for you," he said.

CHAPTER V.

"THE LITTLE VICTIMS PLAY."

THE friendship of Dale and Harefel grew with their growth. Life went by full of play and work, and before they had realised that boyhood could ever end, they were almost men. But though the Eton world was full of bustle and pleasure, Dale often went apart to think of it and of his part in it. Indeed, but for his cousin's unfailing pleasantness and quickening influence, he might have turned from his fellows in petulant scorn or cold contempt, or have slowly drifted away from them in proud shyness. Very few boys have time enough to dissipate a companion's reserve; but Harefel came like a young David of fair countenance, and brought kindness and harmony into the tent, where Dale was sulking. Dale liked Harefel: so he liked his troop of friends, because they liked Harefel; and

so by degrees he grew fond of many of them for their own sake. He enjoyed the feeling of fellowship; his school-work became less distasteful, because his friends were doing the same; he threw himself more eagerly into the games, tasting the new delight of thoughtlessness, or bending his whole soul to desire of victory for the House. So it came to pass that in the eyes of most of his companions he appeared a good sort of fellow, seeking honour in the usual paths, and not much more wayward than other boys. His occasional fancies for solitude were dismissed as sulks, and his reading of strange books was half resented as affectation. In short, he was an odd sort of fellow, but not so bad. Of course he was not to be compared with his cousin. Everybody liked Harefel, and he liked everybody. He was almost incapable of suspicion, and would scarcely believe his own eyes, if they bore witness to the faults of a friend. His gaiety never made him unkind; and his serious moods could always be banished by a word. He lived every moment, doing his work easily and well, and enjoying all sport and fun. When he thought about his pleasant life, which was not often, he generally thought how much it was deepened and enriched by his friendship for Dale. But for Dale,

his gaiety and popularity might so easily have led him into idleness and folly. But for him, he might never have felt that there was anything more important than cricket.

So these boys grew ever nearer to each other. Each believed that he owed much to the other; and each was deeply glad that he owed it to him. They liked to do all things well; and to each it was an added pleasure that the other thought it good. They walked and talked together; they ran and rowed together; they messed together; they read together, except where Harefel, with his cool good sense, refused to follow; they lived together, so far as the most popular boy in the school could live with a single friend.

In Dale's last half at Eton the two friends used much of the leisure time which was not devoted to football in practice for the school hurdle-race, and with such good effect, that on the morning of the contest it was generally believed that one of them would win. It was a splendid day in the autumn, so full of life that it was impossible to believe that the year was growing old. The air was quickened by a touch of frost, but the sun was bright. On such days overworked masters swing their sticks as they walk, and boys run frantic with joy. As Dale,

in a state of much suppressed excitement, turned into his dame's after school, he heard young people chattering before him, and one voice raised high above the others for emphasis. "Well, I would give anything," said this shrill voice, "for Harefel to win." The words made Dale stop, and in a moment the life and sunlight went out of the air. The speaker was a foolish pleasant boy, to whom he had shown many kindnesses, and given some good advice, and for whom he felt that sort of tenderness which we feel for weak creatures needing our help. Dale turned away, and went up-stairs to his room. There he walked backwards and forwards, growing more and more gloomy with every turn. The idle words of this boy seemed the voice of the school. He felt himself an outcast, removed by no fault of his own from the thoughts and feelings of his fellows. The tears came into his eyes, as he longed to show his whole nature to a friend. As he continued his mechanical movement through the narrow room, one moment he hated the talents which cut him off from sympathy, the next he hugged them to him with passionate scorn of his comrades, who knew so much less than he. Once with a moment's pause of horror he found himself thinking bitterly of his cousin, and of the popularity

which he gained so easily with a smile. The crowding thoughts and feelings, and the restless movements, were stopped by Harefel's voice, which was calling him from the street. He did not answer, but stood still; and as he stood, a thought struck him, which brought the colour to his cheek and the light to his eyes. His teeth fastened into his lower lip, and at the corners of his mouth was the suggestion of a sarcastic smile. Again the voice called him impatiently. He threw open the window, and nodding to the fresh face upturned from below, called out in his pleasantest tone that he would be down in a minute. As the two friends walked towards the meadow where the races were to be held, Dale was in the highest spirits. He saw the boy whose words had affected him so much, and called out gaily to him, asking if he wished him luck.

"Yes," said the other, who had quite forgotten that he was a warm supporter of the chief opponent.

Dale laughed so strangely, that Harefel looked at him with some surprise. "You are in great form to-day," he said; and added affectionately, "you old brute, you know that you are at least five yards better than me in fine weather."

"I think that you will win," said his cousin, quietly.

Even the bald, broad meadow looked beautiful in the autumn sunlight: beyond the plain, was the river gleaming, and beyond the river, the old castle rose royally into the clear cool air. Around the course, which was marked out by ropes, boys were already thronging, some with a fine affectation of indifference, others babbling eagerly of the chances. There were to be two heats in the hurdle-race, and the two first in each heat would start in the final.

Dale won his first race easily, and, having put on a thick coat, stood near the starting-place, nervously anxious for Harefel's victory. As he looked at his cousin, he was moved to a new sense of his perfection. "If I were a sculptor," he thought, "he should stand always like that in marble. No wonder everybody is fond of him," he added, with a sigh. Forgetful of himself, with eyes fixed upon the starter's hand, the young athlete was leaning very slightly forward. His lips were just parted, and his chest filled with a long breath. The fine muscles were delicately marked under the bright clear skin. The hope that he would win grew twice as strong. Boys are much influenced by their eyes, having but little time for meditating on

character, and being apt, half lazily, to take all sorts of merit for granted in those whose looks and manners are pleasant. It was but for a moment that Harefel stood thus motionless on the brink of quick motion. The word was given, and the competitors were flying over the hurdles. Harefel jumped beautifully, with regular steps, and clean long leaps. At the third flight it was clear that he would win his heat: with another year's strength, it would have been certain that he would win the final also. As it was, he expected to be beaten by his cousin, who went very quickly over hurdles, in a somewhat headlong manner. He found Dale, as they were preparing for the final contest, unusually calm, and apparently preoccupied. As they stood ready for the race, there was the greatest excitement among the spectators. Harefel, who was quivering like a hound held in the leash, felt a strange exaltation, as his eye glanced down the line of faces. He seemed to be lifted on a wave of silent sympathy. Dale stood next to him, dull and listless, with his eyes fastened on his cousin. He did not stir, until he saw Harefel spring forward at the word, but he had caught him at the second flight of hurdles. The other two competitors were already outpaced. Then broke a roar of encourage-

ment from every quarter. Side by side the two friends flashed across the hurdles and the spaces between. As they rose together at the eighth flight, Dale glanced at his cousin, whose eyes were fixed on the goal. They crossed the next gap with equal strides, and leapt together at the ninth hurdles. There was but one more row. It was time for Dale's greater strength to tell. For a moment he showed in front, lengthened his stride, got too close to the last flight, and jumped a foot too high. Still in the air, he saw his cousin fly by him, and ran in a yard behind. As he stopped, he grew dizzy. It seemed as if his ears were deafened by the clamour of applause which greeted Harefel's victory. He gave a curious little laugh, as an acquaintance helped him into his coat. He wanted to be alone in his room; he feared that he might say something, which he knew he would regret. He could hardly help calling out the truth. He had put great pressure on himself, and was suffering from reaction.

Later in the day, Harefel found his cousin sitting silent in his room. He came in smiling, but half shyly. "Well, old man, I was awfully surprised," he said, and laid his hand on his shoulder for a mute apology. Dale looked at him strangely, and

observed, "Well, I suppose the fellows are pleased."

"They are all awfully kind, of course; but I hope you don't mind about it. It was hard luck on you, that mistake at the last hurdle. I thought I was beaten."

"Did you?"

Harefel was rather hurt. He was generally met more than half way, even when he asked pardon for a fault, and here he had committed none.

"It was not your fault," said Dale, with a grim smile; "it is almost the last act of my life here, and I don't regret it. That is enough."

When he was again alone, he sat for a long time slouching in his chair, and thinking. As he looked back on Eton days, they seemed very fair. He thought of quiet cloisters, old red buildings, service in the chapel, where his young hopes had often soared high on the music, bright hours on the river, dreams under the elm-trees, friendships made and loosed, work and play, riot and idleness, and many little things which are great to school-boys. As he sat alone, all the light of life seemed over. He was sure that he would never feel like a boy again. As he thought of himself going out into a disappointing world, he was filled with pity, and

he longed for somebody who would know and feel for him. The tears rose to his eyes, and he was too listless to brush them away. If there were only somebody, to whom he could open his whole heart. His cousin would never understand him. "If I had a mother," he said to himself, "a real mother, I would tell her that I let Ned win."

PART II.



CHAPTER VI.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

"BUT she is pretty," said the Duchess of Ruffborough.

That incomparable civil servant, Mr Hubert Hanley Smart Hanley, made haste to protest. "My dear duchess," he said, "say rather comely. It is the beauty of the dairy."

The duchess, presenting her own pale daughter to the world, had announced that she was a beauty. She had acquainted Mr Hanley with the fact; he had mentioned it everywhere, and most people had accepted a belief which saved the trouble of discussion. "Come in to-morrow evening," said the great lady, "if you have nothing better to do." He had nothing better to do. "And bring a song," she added. He would be delighted; he bowed and smiled to her shoulder, and accepted his dismissal.

Old Lady Dunduffy, looking round on mankind with harassed and eager eyes, was understood to mutter her doubts whether so brilliant an appearance in a young girl could be considered proper. There could be no doubt as to the propriety of the Hon. Sophia Dunne and her sisters, more numerous than the cardinal virtues.

"A thundering pretty girl," said Captain Loyd, who had gone from Eton into the Grenadiers, and who was held by his juniors an uncommonly good judge of the other sex. The young giant, in moving to a better post of observation, trod heavily on the little patent-leather foot of Tom Peepin. Mr Peepin, who claims descent from the ancient kings of France, disguised his agony, and whispered to his big friend that the new beauty came of a monstrous old family, which had intermarried with the Coventry branch of his own illustrious race.

"This golden hair is really too common," observed Miss Braunenbaum, the heiress.

"Take care, my poy," said Leonard Grunenhausen, to a friend; "she is peutiful as the dawd, but she has three little prothers." He held up three fat fingers for emphasis, and placed one of them for a moment by the side of his shapely nose.

Lord Humphrey Durfey, who never spoke to

girls because they were so heavy in hand, asked for an introduction to the new beauty. Mrs Midel-mass Duff, who had been in close conversation with Lord Humphrey, wondered what men could see in a girl so totally deficient in style. Mrs Midelmass Duff has style. She is famous for her resemblance to a great *prima donna* of Parisian *opéra bouffe*, and, according to her friend Lady Raddley, is apt to forget that she is not dressing for the part of the Princess Popomakamikka in the play. But then Lady Raddley has no doubt heard that cruel speech about her own brilliant colour, and is well aware that Mrs Duff has wit, a pretty wit, and as Parisian as her gowns.

Miss Katharine Adare was pleased and irritated by the excitement which she caused. To wake from a life of school-room, park, and village—to wake and find herself famous in the glare and bustle of society—was too sudden a change. She wanted time to consider her position—to enjoy her triumph. She wanted to observe this strange world; but wherever she looked she saw only eyes, before which she must drop her own. The air seemed full of her whispered name. So many people were thinking about her, that she was obliged to think about herself. She had to as-


sume unconsciousness of the admiration around her, and to enter rooms with a fine air of self-possession. All this was very hard to one so frank by nature, and so little given to pondering on her own states of mind. She looked in the glass with unwonted anxiety. She wondered if she was really so handsome. She was half inclined to lament the brilliancy of her appearance. These golden blondes are too rare, like the masterpieces of the great Venetian, who dipped his brush in sunlight. The tall, proud girl was half ashamed of her beauty. She told herself that she was countrified, and resisted the temptation to powder. It was not until she found herself in the country at Easter that Miss Katharine tasted the sweets of success. She was free once more, and able to be natural. She enjoyed the humour of the thing. She conjured up the picture of the shy school-girl, and that of the young lady of fashion, and laughed at herself in both characters. She laughed at the men, too, as she called to mind the heavy attentions of Captain Loyd, and the half-timid, half-patronising, compliments of Mr Peepin, who was but a nervous man of the world. She thought that she knew all about Society now, and was ready to play her part in all its pageants. She fancied all sorts of dazzling

scenes, omitting the crushing and weariness. She was too full of life to be tired. When old women in the village, grateful for jelly or port, invoked blessings on her pretty face, she laughed and blushed at the thought of more dangerous flatterers.

On a fair morning in April, Miss Katharine stood by the open window of her mother's boudoir. She watched the light shadows of the flying clouds pass on the sloping hill. She saw where the broken shaft of sunlight was quenched in a far wooded hollow. She felt the springtime in her heart, and her lips began to shape a silent song. She was wondering what Irvine would think of her social triumph. No doubt he would sneer at her frivolity. He would be vexed, as he had so often been, by her failure to take a sufficiently wide view of life. If he were by her side, she knew that she could sting him into an epigram or two about the dining class. So she began to wish for one of their old quarrels. She smiled, as the world before her eyes changed in its April mood. The old world was so young, light-hearted, and debonair, that the girl's lips rounded themselves, and the beautiful Miss Adare began to whistle.

"Katharine!" said her mother — "Katharine, my dear!" Mrs Adare's voice had an habitual

tone of mild expostulation for her daughter. Early in her married life she had soothed the restless baby. At a later period she had felt it her duty to tone down the gay spirits of the little girl, who for some time connected a visit to the boudoir with entering church. She often observed plaintively that it was strange that all the children took after their poor father. She had a mild delight in theories; and when her great, strong husband was accidentally killed, amid all her real and deep grief, there was some comfort in the thought that she could bring up her girl and three boys according to her own ideas. Nevertheless these ideas remained for the most part mere food for conversation, and the children scrambled up as children do, learning something from governesses and more from each other, until the boys were all at school. Then the tall girl in the short frock, who looked so awkward to the maternal eye, received all that soft repression which was Mrs Adare's sole practical contribution to the education of her family. The mother loved the daughter, checked her as a duty, and envied her her buoyancy and gladness. She was a little jealous of her, though she had never confessed it to herself, and would have been horrified at the bare thought.



Katharine was very fond of her mother, but began very early in life to be puzzled by her. Rebuked for noise, she set up her parent as a model of repose, and tried hard to imitate her. She prayed for help with much simplicity, and at one time forced herself to lie on the sofa so often, that Mrs Adare was suddenly seized with a panic and telegraphed for a London doctor.

As the girl grew up in health and beauty, she abandoned the effort after languor, and tried to atone for her want of repose by a good use of her natural activity. She was always ready to do some trifling service for her mother. Now, on this sweet spring morning, when she knew that she had offended her ears, she made haste to offer to read aloud. A pile of books lay on a small table by the couch, a volume of English history, the last book of popular science, and three new volumes from the circulating library. Mrs Adare had always held that a woman's education should not end at her marriage. She still believed that she kept up with the thought of the day. When people spoke of the last learned books, she sometimes said modestly enough that she had looked into them, and that they were very abstruse. She would have been unhappy if she had not had them

near her, but they were generally under the novel. She had been educated abroad, was a remarkably good linguist, a pretty woman with a pretty affectation of age, and frequently called clever. Certainly she was popular with clever people, who were brought to her and brought each other. "You must know Mrs Adare," was a common phrase among persons of mind. She agreed with everybody who talked well. She could not resist an analogy or a French proverb. A good phrase converted her, and stayed by her. It turned up pleasantly in future talks; but she did not talk much. She was an admirable listener, and pleasant to look upon as she listened. It is not strange that she was popular with clever people.

"I don't want to be read to, dear," said the gentle lady; "I want you to come and sit by me for a little while, and be quiet. Will you?"

Miss Katharine, with a little look of comic penitence, made haste to do as she was bid.

"It is time that you gave up these boy's tricks, slang and whistling. Will you try? to please me?"

She held the girl's hand in her slim white fingers, and patted it as she continued, "Now that you are out in Society, you know." She smiled gently as

she remembered that her daughter had been a great success.

"Yes, mamma, I'll try; but, you know, it is awfully hard—I mean it is very hard, with those boys about the house. I wonder where they are now?"

She paused, and then added in a tone of sympathy, "They are sure to be up to some lark or other."

"Katharine!" said Mrs Adare.

"Oh, mamma, I am so sorry. I never can think of the right word till afterwards. Mamma, when is Irvine coming back from abroad?"

"Irvine, Irvine," repeated her mother, in an absent manner. She was languidly stroking her girl's bright hair, and smiling faintly. When she had succeeded in reducing a listener to repose, she herself was apt to fall into such a state of dreamy calm, that she forgot to say what she intended, and sometimes unconsciously uttered her passing thoughts aloud. She was in such a mood, when she presently observed, in a low, contemplative tone, "You might do better than that."

"Mamma!" cried Katharine; "what do you mean?"

"What do I mean by what, dear? I was thinking of Irvine Dale."

"And you said that I might do better." The girl's cheeks were blushing, but her eyes could not help laughing.

"Katharine, my child, how can you use such an expression! It is really terribly vulgar. There, there, I know that it was only thoughtlessness; and Irvine has really grown up into a very nice, gentlemanlike young man. Though he certainly has some very absurd ideas."

As her mother had gradually sunk into silence, the daughter hazarded a remark. "Perhaps he is not so very wrong after all, mamma."

"Oh yes, he is, dear," said Mrs Adare, calmly. "He is full of wild, young-men's notions. All the best thinkers——" Here her voice sank to rest, but she stretched her hand towards the pile of books beside her, vaguely conscious of their protecting power. Her eyes were still turned towards her daughter, and her outstretched hand accidentally rested on the novel. After a pause she went on absently, "He has had a very long minority, and must be worth seven or eight thousand a-year. It is a pity that he is not more like other people."

"Mamma," said Katharine, "what are you talking about?"

"Don't interrupt me, dear; I was thinking."

"Why do people wish to be more like other people? I think it is nice to see somebody different, like Irvine."

"You are talking a great deal about Irvine," said her mother; and then, rousing herself to the execution of a maternal duty, she continued, "You know that I have always thought and said that parents should leave their daughters' choice quite unfettered." Here she paused, and presently repeated the words "quite unfettered" in a low voice, as if she was pleased with the expression, while her eyes wandered off to the corner of the room.

"Yes, mamma, of course," said the daughter, who was interested in the subject, but growing very restless on her stool.

"I think that picture is crooked," said Mrs Adare, meditatively.

Katharine, glad of an excuse for doing something, jumped up to put it straight; but when she looked round with her hand on the frame, she saw that her mother was absorbed in her novel. She went back smiling, and standing just behind the head of the sofa, bent down till her lips were close to her mother's ear, and whispered, "Now, mamma, put down your book, please, and tell me what

you were going to say about a daughter's choice."

"I told you, dear, but you don't attend to what I say. You jumped up about something, just as I was telling you to take time and not to choose in a hurry."

"Mamma, dear, you never said a word."

"You must allow me to know what I said, dear. I am not quite a fool," observed Mrs Adare, plaintively.

"I am very sorry. Won't you please say it again? Do, please;" and she passed her arms round her mother's neck.

Mrs Adare was much strengthened by the support. She put down her book, and addressed herself firmly to the point. "Did Irvine ever say—I mean, did you ever promise—did he ever say anything that led you to think—there, you know what I mean." But Miss Katharine made no answer. "Did you ever think that he—in fact, that he cared about you?" Mrs Adare made a futile effort to look at her daughter, who was standing directly behind her.

That young lady pursed her lips quaintly, and presently said, "I don't think Irvie will ever care about anybody in that way." As she spoke, she

doubted, remembering some vague words of the young man, which made her blush and smile; and she saw again the look on his face as he said "Good-bye."

"Well, well, dear, you need not be in a hurry," said Mrs Adare; "you have plenty of time before you." Then she added, in an absent manner, "She can take her choice;" and smoothing her gown with an air of satisfaction, she picked up her novel once more.

Her daughter looked at her with a comical air. As she thought of her new power, of which she had been so lately unconscious, her lips parted until her feeling found expression in a little laugh. Having glanced at her mother, she went noiselessly to the looking-glass, and looked critically at herself. "I wonder if Irvie would see such a wonderful change in me," she murmured, as she moved lightly across to the window. It was an exquisite day of broken sunshine and flying shadows. She wondered why none of the party who were staying at Islay Place had come to see them. She caught herself thinking that she was now too important a person to be neglected for a whole day, and she laughed at herself for the thought. As she was idly tapping the glass with her finger-tips, she saw

Ned Harefel striding along the path which leads from Islay through the fields. She watched him with that pleasant feeling of superiority which we enjoy in the free observation of a friend who cannot be assuming anything for our benefit. Presently he caught sight of her. She saw him start, and his whole bearing change. She flushed suddenly, and half drew back, as a new idea struck her. She gave a little petulant shake of her head. Ned and she had always been close friends. Was she going to think that the whole world were in love with her? She was a goose, and her head was turned by flattery. So she gave a low laugh, declared to herself that she would put away all silly notions for ever, and began to whistle that same gay air of Italy which had been interrupted some time before.

“Katharine!” said Mrs Adare, looking up with dreamy eyes from her book, “Katharine!”

CHAPTER VII.

A YOUNG AMBASSADOR.

MR EDWARD HAREFEL, stepping quickly along the little path, by the shy stream which runs into the bushes and is betrayed by laughter, through the meadows awaking to the spring and glad with the short-lived beauty of daffodils, a young man with poetry made visible around him and breathing in the air, was yet not making sonnets. Corydon was guiltless of verses, and was going to Amaryllis for advice. Very early in life he had acquired the notion that it was the joint duty of Miss Katharine and himself to keep Irvine Dale out of mischief. Though Irvine was older and cleverer than his guardians, he still needed looking after, as so many dangerously clever young persons do. So Mr Edward was on his way to Miss Katharine with two portentous letters, which he had received from Italy

that morning. He and she had often consulted about their eccentric friend; and though this matter looked terribly grave, there was for him much sweetness in the thought of being once more associated with her. She was a young lady now, and exquisitely fair.

The letters which Harefel had received that morning had been written, the one at Amalfi, the other at Rome. He opened his cousin's first:—

“DEAR NED,—Why ask about my plans? I won't make any. I won't go back to Oxford at present. Why should I? If the College object, they may send me down. To have to think of the place is bad enough. It is like a tomb of cold grey stone, a tomb where young men bury their hope and faith. As to charity, if tolerance be charity, let us rub out the old passage about charity suffering much, and put in ‘Charity cares for none of these things.’ The glorious crown of the highest education of the country is a fine indifference as to what becomes of your neighbour. Let him go to the devil in his own way. We will not interfere, and we pride ourselves on our toleration. Let us alone. Don't ask us to do anything. So much may be said for doing the opposite. Some are active

enough, of course, picking up scraps of knowledge, which will gain marks, which will bring money. Good, sensible souls! Why am I not of them? For me our great, world-renowned, historic, bloated University is but a cumbrous machine for producing bags of wind, a Juggernaut, a school of paralysis. Dear old boy, you will shake your head over my nonsense. Of course I know, Oxonian as I am, that so much is to be said on the other side. The truth is, that I am sick to death of my little list of rules for purifying religion, elevating humanity, reforming the universe. When I went up to Oxford, I had an awful appetite for these things. It seemed so easy to do almost everything, when one once understood it all. Here were people all about ready to make us understand. It was intoxicating to acquire so much knowledge. On Monday, I chanced on a law which explained all the processes of the universe. On Tuesday, I came across a system to which all people might so easily conform, and become on a sudden wise and good. On Wednesday, I found that my law was attacked and my system demolished. On Thursday, I saw the great beauty of toleration; there was some truth on every view of a subject. 'O liberty!' I cried on Friday, and glowed with a generous enthusiasm for

my neighbour's right to get drunk. On Saturday, I was ready to cry 'Vanity' with the Preacher; and on Sunday, lo! there was vanity in the pulpit. Of course, I am a very poor creature, and I am not strong enough to stand it. I feel like a lucky brute escaped out of a trap. My old formulæ hang in shreds about me. I am well out of my plans for reforming everything and everybody. I will try to reform myself, and one of my first reforms shall be ceasing to write about myself. You are so awfully good and kind, that I can't help inflicting myself upon you. When I think what a prig I have been for my first two years at Oxford, I despise myself. I hope that is the beginning of wisdom. I believe that in my heart I was glad that a bad thing was, if I could say a good thing about it. There is a depth. Here, at divine Amalfi, I breathe, and am not worried to death. The sky is full of rest; men and women are unlike humanity with the H writ large; the lithe brown fishermen do not discuss my chances in the schools. I have gained one thing. If I don't believe much in other people, I have ceased to have an arrogant belief in myself. Perhaps I may make something of myself yet. Meanwhile I will drop myself, O most long-suffering Edward!

"I could not stay in Rome. There is too great a jumble. Greek fragments, Roman arches, mediæval palaces, new boulevards, cake-shops, balls, Pope, King, Republican, French fashions in the Pantheon, English broughams before St Peter's, bustle, tattle, gossip, above the dust of all those cities which have been Rome. Florence was small, and not beyond my comprehension. The Archers went straight from Florence to Amalfi. They asked me to follow, and so here I am. I caught a glimpse of Leonard Aubrey in the Eternal City, not depressed even by that old monster. He was here, there, and everywhere, on foot and on horseback, dancing, flirting, full of quips and cranks, with eyes as wide open as ever and tongue as ready. It is good to see one of us enjoy life. Every other young man grumbles at his own work, and wants to do something else. Leonard does nothing or everything, and is wildly happy. Did I tell you about my Florentine friends, the Archers? Sebastian Archer was, it seems, a friend of my father. It is certain that he is a character. Lazy with a magnificent laziness, but a great man of business. He pulls strings in every capital of Europe, and is rich and poor according to the fluctuation of loans. He is painter, musician, journalist, once a diplomat, perhaps a hungry Græ-

culus, certainly a Jack-of-all-trades. He is funniest as a father. He is wonderfully kind to her, and understands her better than one would think. She is not easily read. There is a strange power in her, perhaps in her eyes, which are grey, now dark, now light, now deep and full of meaning, now frank and shallow as a child's. A strange young woman, and only half attractive, I think. You will think I am getting into mischief, if I write more. No, most prudent cousin. I only half like her; but I like the problem. I am not sure that she is beautiful, but she moves beautiful; and her eyes—but no more of them. She is severely simple in dress, smooth and classical about the head, tall, slim, and seventeen. She might be the Lørelei, or a modern vision of a Greek Siren. Capri might be her island. White bones of fishing lads beside the dark-blue sea. The great thing about her is that she works hard. She is a great musician, with a most wonderful voice—a voice which will be splendid if she gain power. She is bent on a career in opera. Fancy that! She is certain of her vocation, and works without ever stopping to ask if it is any use, and if life is not a delusion. What a lesson for me! I am sorely tempted to tear this monstrous letter. But you will bear with me, as you always do. Destroy

the first half, my confessions of a child of our generation. The rest will do as news for all. Say that I am wonderfully well; and give my love to aunt Ellen and the rest.—Yours ever, my dear old confessor,

IRVINE DALE."

The first half of this letter was destroyed, according to the writer's request. The rest, together with the weird scrawl of Leonard Aubrey, was submitted to the scrutiny of Miss Adare. Ned stood near her, and watched her as she read. She did not look up, and she held her right hand above her eyes, so that her face was in shadow. When she had finished Irvine's epistle, she pushed it from her with a quick movement, and drew Leonard Aubrey's into its place. It was a characteristic production:—

"TEDDI MIO,—If you wish to save our Irvine from the common doom, fly on the wings of cousinly affection to Amalfi, where the *belle demoiselle sans merci* is looking after him and his pretty fortune. I have not seen her; but the Florentine gossips—and all the Anglo-Americano-Florentines are gossips—say that he is netted. A sweet voice. they tell me; *item*, a graceful figure, but too slim;

item, a manner earnest and abrupt; *item*, inscrutable eyes: and is not this the sort of thing to do for our sentimental cousin? He would not stay here in Rome, but was restless and scornful. I approached the rumour with my wonted delicacy; and was answered by a curl of the lip, a glance of the eye, a departure of the person. The next day he was off to the southern sea. Therefore, Stimatissimo Teddi, after him if you love him, and do not decide that I must of necessity be wrong, being myself; for is it not openly said by old Lady Tab-bit, who is just arrived from Florence with all the latest stories, and by Sir Rodney Tiffin at the English Club? Imagine the picture! He and she are by the southern sea, and nobody else but Sebastian Archer, the father, whom I have seen, and who is charming. He will not check young love, being in want of money, indisposed to labour, fond of expensive smoke, and of ordering new clothes from long-suffering tailors. Don't let our Irvine know that I write this. I never wrote so much before. But it is a grave case. So no more from your wise, prudent, reverend friend and well-wisher,

“LEONARDO.”

“Well?” asked Ned, anxiously, as Miss Katha-

rine pushed aside the second letter with a careless gesture.

"Well?" she echoed, as she rose and walked towards the window. "Why did you bring the letters to me?" Her back was turned to him.

"Why did I bring them to you!" he said, in great astonishment. "Why, of course I brought them to you. I knew that you would be interested."

"Who? I?"

"Of course. And I want your advice. I want to know what to do."

"I can hardly advise on such a matter," she said, coldly. "What does your mother think?"

"She has not seen the letters. I brought them to you at once, first of all. I thought that you took some interest in poor Irvine."

"Really, Ned, you do the strangest things. If anybody is interested in this—in this matter, I suppose it is your mother." She gave a little laugh.

Harefel did not know what to think. He had never seen Miss Katharine in so strange a temper. Surely Society could not spoil a young lady so quickly. "Then you think I had better take them to my mother?" he stammered.

"I really can't undertake to give any opinion on the subject," said Miss Adare, with her stateliest manner. "I am sorry to leave you. I have some things to do in the village;" and she went away smiling and calm.

Truly the ways of women were wonderful to that straightforward and sensible man, Mr Edward Harefel. He strode home somewhat faster than he came, feeling snubbed and vexed. On his way he made up his mind that he would show himself capable of decisive action, even without Miss Adare's counsel. She should be surprised by his independence and decision. He would depart incontinently to Amalfi, and bend all his energies to the rescue of his cousin. He would bring him back in triumph, after a brilliant success, in which the young lady had no share. Then she would be vexed in turn, and he would be magnanimous.

He found his parents and his aunt Susan assembled in the drawing-room at Islay Place. Miss Harefel was at work on a long procession of grey-green geese, wrought on a green-grey ground. Lady Harefel was knitting little garments for a friend's baby. Sir Joseph, weighing the paper-knife in one hand, and with brows contracted to a proper degree of gravity, was turning over the report of the Great

Foreign Egg Committee. All wore an air of repose, which was rudely dispelled by the entry of the son of the house, and his abrupt declaration that he must go to Italy.

"Is Irvine ill?" cried his mother.

"Or is he in ——" began Miss Susan, and stopped in some confusion.

"No, he is well enough," said Ned; "but perhaps I had better read you these letters," and he pulled them out of his pocket. As it became clear to Lady Harefel that her nephew was in the toils of a designing woman, her face assumed an expression of profound regret, tempered by a secret satisfaction. Miss Susan was so busy filling in details of the romance, and painting the southern sky a deeper blue, that she had scarcely time to hope that Irvine would behave badly in the judgment of the cruel world. This lady, who would carry out an elaborate scheme for transferring a caterpillar from the gravel to a neighbouring shrub, had a latent tenderness for the poetic hero who absorbs a maiden's love for his own culture, and, after a passionate farewell, leaves the maiden to die by the Italian sea. She imagined Irvine shaking his bridle-rein, and thought how tenderly she would rebuke his roving fancy. In both ladies there was

an excitement not wholly painful. Indeed, the probability of a marriage in the family was so interesting, that it may well be doubted whether, if Ned Harefel had declared the story his own invention, their disappointment would not for the moment have been stronger than their relief. Though Lady Harefel uttered frequent exclamations of horror, she wore an expression of unusual animation; and Miss Susan, who sighed and shook her head, was enjoying a romance which came so near her own life. Sir Joseph also found consolation for a "bad business" in the justification of his often-expressed belief that his nephew would "make a fool of himself some day." There was a new cause of excitement and alarm in the name of Mr Sebastian Archer. When it was uttered, Sir Joseph looked at his wife, who replied by an exclamation of alarm.

"The evil genius of the family," muttered Miss Susan.

"He half ruined your poor uncle Eustace," said the baronet to his son.

It appeared that Mr Archer was a most alarming person; a man suspected of many things, and convicted of none; a man of family, who was at home with any one, from a duke to a dustman; a man

of no apparent means, who lived always in ease and luxury. Ned felt that all his powers would be required.

"Start for Italy, my boy," said Sir Joseph, who fancied that he had originated the idea, "and see what can be done."

"Oh, Joseph, is it healthy at this time of year?" cried his wife; and then to her son, "Don't leave off your flannels because it is warm; and don't go without a bottle of something, which I will give you."

"Bring him back to us," said Miss Susan, in a low voice, as she pressed her nephew's hand with her long fingers.

The young man glowed at the thought that he was the envoy of the family, and went away briskly to make the most sensible preparations for his journey, discarding firmly but kindly at least half the things which his mother declared indispensable. He told himself that he would be severely practical, and show Miss Katharine Adare that there was something worth doing outside a ball-room, and that he could do it.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT AMALFI.

HAD Lady Harefel been able to see the slopes above Amalfi on one of the brightest mornings of spring, her fears would have been strengthened. Tired of climbing up the steep path, Marion Archer had seated herself on the green bank, and was looking far out to sea with wide open eyes. She had taken off her hat, that she might feel the light air on her temples, but her lips were not smiling. There was a quaint look of gravity on the fair young face.

“And why should not a woman be able to live for art?” she asked.

Irvine had thrown himself down beside her little feet, and was looking up at her face with most lively curiosity. For days he had thought so much about this girl, that he had scarcely found time to

think about himself. "Why not?" he asked. "But they never do," he added. He wished to make her pour out all her thoughts; but she seemed not to hear him, as she looked over the water blue and green, gleaming like a serpent's scales in the sun. So he was irritated into talk by her unconcern, and began to pour forth his ideas on women, saying some things which he really thought, some which were fragments of other people's speeches, some which he thought he believed, some which sounded striking. She paid little attention to all this: only it caused in her a sudden consciousness that there was an element of unreality in her own little speech about living for art, and she began to move her foot impatiently. Then he too became silent, and rather sulky, until presently she began to murmur a song; and then his eyes grew dark and moist again, as he felt that strange attraction which her tones had for him. He was sure that her voice affected him, and him alone, in that peculiar manner. It was with a sense of rebellion against this influence that he said abruptly, when she paused, "I suppose I must leave this place."

"Oh, I shall be so sorry!" she said.

"Why?" he asked, curiously.

"There is nobody else here ;" and, after a pause, she added, "Besides, I sing better to you. I don't know why, but I am sure that I do."

He felt a thrill of pride ; but he said, with an affectation of indifference, "I am good for your art ? I suppose I ought to be very proud. Would you sacrifice all your friends to your voice ?"

"I would give anything to be a great artist. And I will be if I can."

"You can be if you will."

"You really think I can ?" she asked, eagerly.

"Oh, of course I know nothing about it," he said, with a little laugh.

She jumped up impatiently, and with her chin and eyebrows raised, looked far away to sea. "I cannot understand why you talk like that to me," she said. "You are not really so modest."

"Thank you," he said. "At least you may trust me to know my faults, if I know nothing else."

She was perched on the edge of the path, and absorbed by the beauty of the scene. A fishing-boat was riding toward the beach below, and in the bows stood a young fisherman, tall and brown, bearing a coil of rope, in act to throw. Lithe, erect, and lightly poised, he seemed an antique bronze,

but full of life. As she looked, she was listening to the music of Masaniello.

"Take care," said Irvine; "you are on dangerous ground." As she spoke, a tuft of grass fell from under her foot: she gave a little cry, and tottered: he sprang to her, caught her in his arms, and drew her hastily backward.

At that moment a young man, who was climbing the path from the inn, came in sight of them, and stood still in amazement. It was Ned Harefel. The young diplomatist, whose head was full of artful means by which he should succeed in carrying off his cousin, was so surprised, that he cried out, "Good gracious, Irvie! what are you at?" And Irvine Dale, whose feelings were in a tumultuous state, glared at his best friend across the young girl's lifeless form, and found no pleasanter greeting than the sharp question, "What have you come here for?" So these two young men stood and looked at each other, until Miss Archer opened her eyes, and moved quietly from her supporter's arm.

"I am sorry I was so silly," she said. Then she turned to him with charming frankness, and held out her hand, saying, "Thank you for saving me."

"It is only a steepish slope," said Irvine, almost sulkily, and looking at his cousin.

The girl smiled, and walked down the path, passing Mr Harefel as if she did not see him. Ned was rather annoyed. He could not see her eyes, and did not know whether she had heard his imprudent exclamation. When the two cousins were left alone, an awkward pause ensued.

"Do you mean to stay here long?" asked Irvine, with a fine appearance of unconcern.

"I thought I would join you for a week or two. Easter is a good time for the Continent, I think, and——" here he suddenly perceived a chance for diplomacy, "I thought, perhaps, that we might go home together." He looked out to sea, as if it were a matter of little importance whether or no Mr Irvine Dale settled at Amalfi for life.

"Oh, thanks," said Irvine, inspecting the horizon, "but my movements are rather uncertain."

Ned was inclined to agree with this last statement, but he contented himself with observing, in an off-hand manner, "I suppose that was the young lady you mentioned in one of your letters?"

Harefel took credit to himself for his respectful manner of mentioning this designing person; but he did not make great progress in his mission—for his cousin, who seemed to think that an observation required no answer, merely said, "You were

going for a walk, I suppose? There are some beautiful views higher up; we shall meet later at the hotel."

Having spoken, he stalked away towards the little town. Ned, with a keen desire to get on to a pleasanter footing, called out, "*Au revoir*, old man," but the familiar words sounded dismally out of place, and his cousin acknowledged them by a slight wave of the hand. Harefel stood a moment in doubt, and then strode away in the opposite direction, and soon forgot his inauspicious beginning in the pleasure of contriving new plans. He had not gone far, when, on suddenly turning a corner, he all but tumbled over a pair of feet cased in an old pair of patent-leather shoes. Sloping gently from these shoes were a pair of long legs, arranged for comfort; then a perceptible interval of white between waistband and waistcoat; then a waistcoat only partially buttoned; and above that a long moustache, fair and rather slender, a long cigar of a most pleasant fragrance, and a soft hat drawn down over the eyes. The young man came to the immediate conclusion that the above articles were part and parcel of Mr Sebastian Archer. He had previously decided that in dealing with so thorough a man of the world a frank

policy was alone possible. Here was an excellent opportunity to redeem his first error. He coughed aloud. He had coughed several times, and had made a wholly unnecessary noise with his boots, before he became aware that a pair of eyes were looking lazily at him from beneath the soft hat. The reclining gentleman never moved a muscle, and the shadow of the hat and the long silky moustache made it almost impossible to decide whether he were smiling or no.

"I beg your pardon," stammered Harefel.

"No necessity," said the other, civilly, but without removing his cigar.

"Mr Archer, I believe?" There was an almost imperceptible nod for answer. "Allow me to introduce myself."

"Quite unnecessary. You are Mr Edward Harefel."

The diplomatist was embarrassed and annoyed. This exhibition of laziness and indifference, combined with extraordinary insight, was both irritating and alarming. Thinking to abash the enemy by extreme courtesy, he raised his hat as he asked, "May I have a word with you?"

"Won't you sit down?" said the other, raising himself to a sitting position, and yawning as he

underwent the exertion. "You are very like your uncle Eustace," he added, after a pause, during which he calmly studied the young man, who was annoyed by the consciousness of a youthful blush.

"I was aware that you knew my uncle," said he, in a tone which was intended to be disagreeable.

"You are more like him than his own son. Irvine is not like his father. Poor, dear Eustace! he did me many kindnesses. A good fellow, but not very wise."

"Not always." Here it occurred to Harefel that to be rude to his new acquaintance was not the best way to gain his end. So with a sudden change of manner he said, "I want to have a word with you on a rather delicate subject. You will forgive me if I speak plainly?"

"It saves trouble," said the other, leaning back and lightly closing his eyes. "What a lovely day it is, to be sure! Do you sketch?"

"I want to speak to you about my cousin."

"A very nice fellow. Young-mannish, but good-hearted. Rather absurd, is he not?"

"We need not discuss Dale's character. I—that is, all his belongings, have reason to fear—I mean, to think that—that, in fact——"

"That Irvie wishes to connect himself with my

family? I hope that you are right." Here was candour indeed.

"Do you mean to say—— Good heavens! What do you mean to say?"

"That if your cousin asks my consent, he shall have it."

"Though it offend every relation and friend he has in the world?"

"Yes."

"Then all I can say is——"

"Don't say it," said Mr Sebastian Archer. "I think it would be a good thing for Irvine, and for my daughter, and for me."

Ned Harefel sprang to his feet, and stood looking down on the recumbent form before him.

"Then, I am to understand," he said, "that Miss Archer and yourself have arranged——"

The other neither opened his eyes nor moved a muscle, as he said, "Stop a minute. Your uncle Eustace was not very clever, but he was a gentleman."

"What has my uncle Eustace to do with it?"

"He would never have mentioned with disrespect a lady of whom he knew nothing."

Harefel bit his lip and flushed hotly. "I beg your pardon," he said, after a moment.

"I will be frank with you," said Mr Archer, "and we will cut it short. I should welcome your cousin as a son-in-law, because I like him, and because I do not altogether like the career which my girl has chosen. I am not half so sure that she would take your cousin." Harefel bit his lip again, to prevent an outbreak of incredulity. "She has some young notions," the other continued, "about devotion to art, and such things. Now, I know a good deal about operas and opera-houses: in fact, I have lost money in several. I would rather see her married to a good man, who could afford to make her happy. Your cousin is not a bad fellow, and not badly off."

In spite of his vexation, Harefel could hardly help laughing. His enemy looked up sideways, and said, "I have never spoken to my daughter about this, nor has she to me. I am sure that your cousin has not proposed, for she would have told me at once. Now, what you have to do is this."

"I am sure I am much obliged to you," muttered Harefel, amused in spite of himself.

"Stay here as long as you like, and reason with your cousin. Tell him that I am certain to borrow money from him. I probably shall. Meanwhile,

we will try to make the place pleasant to you. You sketch? I can show you some lovely spots."

Hereupon the tall gentleman rose slowly, buttoned a few buttons in his waistcoat, shook himself, and with the words, "We shall see you at the inn," strolled down the path. When he had gone a few steps, he looked over his shoulder, and observed carelessly, "Of course you won't repeat what I have said. I am sure that I can trust you; you are so like your uncle."

Mr Harefel stood still, and stared blankly down the path. Then he roused himself with an impatient movement, bit his lip, settled his hat more firmly, and began to walk up the slope. There was no use in regretting the past. He would be severely practical, and decide on his future course. His task was a difficult one, and required all his energies. He could not tell his cousin that Mr Archer had confessed that he wanted him for a son-in-law; for he had distinctly heard those last careless words, and had, moreover, nodded, without pausing to think. Besides, Irvine would never believe that the girl was in the plot; and, indeed, he could not say that he was himself certain of her participation. An attack on her would rouse in his cousin both his natural opposition and his old-

fashioned chivalry, and would probably bring him with a rush to the injured lady's feet. To insist on the opinion of Sir Joseph and Lady Harefel, would be to bring down on himself an angry declamation against insular prejudice. Should he speak of Katharine? He turned impatiently from the thought, assuring himself that it would be useless, and wholly unwilling even to think of her as connected with this matter. He walked and deliberated until he was tired of both ; but the more he thought, the more clear it became to him that he must follow his opponent's advice, and wait. It was annoying and comical. So he sat down by the side of the path and burst out laughing. There was certainly something amusing about this strange father, Mr Sebastian Archer. Under other circumstances, what a pleasant companion he would be ! It was easy to understand how his uncle Eustace had been fascinated by this strange combination of carelessness and grace, sloth and ability—this loose packet of the arts and manners of all countries—this Englishman so superbly cosmopolitan. After all, there was no great hardship in spending a week at Amalfi. He had rushed through Italy, hurrying on through rain and sunshine, harassed by dust and wind. Now, in this warm corner, he woke to

find the Italy of poets. The great sun moved slowly down the sky. The grand curve of the bay stirred vague memories of Greek legend. The colours glowed and deepened on the water, here quivering with hot light, here still and green and marvellously clear. Ned Harefel was not easily impressed by scenery, but he felt the charm of the place and the hour. As he walked back to the inn, he was in a cheerful mood, glad that his duty had brought him to such a place, and confident that, if he must use the weapons suggested by the enemy, he would use them well. He found his cousin with Mr and Miss Archer, seated on the *loggia*, and looking across the little quay to the broad waters, which were settling into gloom. Irvine, the friend whom he loved, and for whose sake he had travelled day and night, greeted him with a cool nod, and turned away to murmur at the ear of the dangerous enchantress; but Sebastian, the enemy whom he was eager to vanquish, held him by the hand while he presented him to his daughter, and almost embraced him with his arm while he congratulated himself on the pleasant addition to their party. It was embarrassing for Mr Edward Harefel. After dinner they returned to the balcony, and the evening was passed in the

dim light. Miss Archer refused to sing, choosing to hear the quiet lapping of the water. She spoke little; but that little was uttered with a manner which Harefel thought too confident for a young girl. Irvine made the briefest inquiries about his friends at home, and was occasionally sarcastic. But the great Sebastian was in his happiest vein, talking, without appearing talkative; listening, with evident interest; telling stories of himself, and arousing no suspicion of egoism; instructing, with a refreshing gaiety; amusing, with a delightful gravity. This man, so graceful and so careless, who wore the best clothes in the easiest manner, had an extraordinary power of charming young men. He made them feel that they were men of the world. When Ned betook himself to rest, he was so busy recalling the remarks of his new friend, that he forgot to rehearse his plans against his new enemy. Thus ended the first day of the conference, in which the Envoy Extraordinary of the Harefel family gained no conspicuous advantage over the representative of Bohemia.

CHAPTER IX.

SUCCESS.

ALL may be retrieved. The wise young man woke with the sun in his eyes, and joy in his heart. To breathe that air was ecstasy, and nothing was impossible. Happiness and duty for once were hand in hand. He would fulfil the object of his mission, and enjoy it too. He would carry off his cousin, but not too quick. Up, young hero, wily as Odysseus by this old Greek sea, put by your shining arms, and clothe yourself with guile! neglect not the poison of asps, O thou sucking-dove! Up, young hero, clear-eyed and stout of limb, for the morning is fair, and youth and beauty and breakfast are awaiting thee! Truly, it is hard to be suspicious in the fresh morning air, in the presence of kindness and beauty. It was very hard for young Mr Harefel to remember that the lazy debonair gentle-

man, who was so much interested in his appetite, was an arch-schemer. Miss Archer, smooth and neat, in pearly tints, could not be changed by any mental effort into a pitiless weaver of spells. Everything seemed frank in the clear atmosphere. They were at breakfast in the wide balcony, as if all the world might see. The striped awning above them just trembled with that lightest breeze which came stepping and pausing across the sun-flecked sea. The envoy was but a young man, after all. His spirits rose in spite of himself. To-morrow he would be cautious ; but to-day ! O boy, fill up his coffee-cup, and crown his curls with short-lived roses ! A little more fish ? If you please. This place is a paradise. I hope you do not take Mr Sebastian Archer for a serpent. He lolls in the sunshine, and sleeps in his coils. Sweet maiden Eve, pass the young gentleman an orange—a golden fruit from the garden of the Hesperides.

A week passed like a day. The dawn came from the sea fresh and fair as a new-born Aphrodite, and the hours went by on strong, still wings, to a more perfect night. It was a revelation of beauty to that simple young islander, Mr Edward Harefel. Amalfi bade fair to be his Capua. His purpose melted in the sun ; his faculties grew drowsy in the soft air.

Young Odysseus had drawn near to the island of the Sirens, and had forgotten to bind himself to the mast. Yet, when he thought about it, he did not approve of Miss Archer. She did not agree with his notion of what a woman should be. She was outspoken—nay, even arrogant—on subjects which are well known to be too deep for her sex. He gathered from occasional remarks that she had formed a plan of life, in which man had no part at all, or one strangely unimportant. She had read so much, of which he had not even heard, that he could hardly satisfy himself by deciding that she was necessarily superficial. And finally, he entertained an awful suspicion that she had once or twice drawn out his views for her amusement. Certainly she was clever, and she sang wonderfully; but she was not the right sort of girl. He felt instinctively that his mother would not approve of her. Of this unuttered criticism, Irvine Dale was painfully conscious. It came to reinforce his own doubts, while it irritated him against the critic. He sniffed more contemptuously at the opinion of the world, the more he felt its influence. His mind was in a ferment. In the presence of the young woman he felt attraction and repulsion. His temper was unequal, and his manners suffered in

consequence. He was rude to his cousin, for fear that he should be rude to the lady, and assumed a cynical tone, which made Sebastian smile, and offended his daughter. Meanwhile Mr Archer grew more and more charming. Surrendering himself wholly to the languid influences of the time, he breathed an air of peace upon the young people about him, which soothed their troubled spirits. He had the rare power of making light of their difficulties without offending them. Before his varied experiences the events of their lives seemed of small importance, while the future was full of endless possibilities. Harefel was completely captivated, and always open-mouthed in the presence of this mentor, who had been everywhere and done everything. He had been as a young diplomatist at every court in Europe, and knew the secret history of every political change and every social scandal. He had been the friend of men who shook the world with a nod, and of women who shook the men with a smile. In less brilliant days, he had edited a paper in the west of America and managed a theatre in Constantinople. He had been correspondent of many papers, and witnessed battles on every plain from Southern France to Central Asia. He had been agent for new rifles, and promoter of

new companies. He played the piano with easy mastery, and spoke Italian sweetly and softly as a Roman tenor. Finally, he had the most graceful air of modesty, and treated his daughter with a delightful mixture of deference, good-fellowship, and paternal care. One day, when the diplomatic Edward lay drowsy on the well-loved balcony, musing idly on the joys of the sun-burnt fisher's life, as one by one the small craft caught the breeze and glided out to sea—on that day so pleasant, and so like its fellows, a great shock came to him. His cousin came quickly out upon him, and said, "I am going to England."

"Going to England!" cried Ned, in dismay.

"To England. Of course you need not come. But I must go."

"Why?" asked Ned, in an injured tone.

"I don't know why: but I must go. I am bothered and—in fact, I must."

Mr Harefel looked dismally at the sea. He was discontented, and the feeling of discontent was to him as unpleasant as unusual. Suddenly a strange thought took away his breath. This was the object of his journey. His mission was successful. He sat up blinking. He certainly had come with the purpose of inducing Irvine Dale to go. Irvine was

going. It was strange that he had forgotten to be glad. The young envoy was about to return in a blaze of triumph. Up, young envoy, and crown thy victorious brows with laurel—up, and away to the north, and don't look so down-hearted about it! He continued to stare at the sea, but its beauty had departed. He was waking from an exquisite dream to the small successes of life. It was certain that, if his cousin went, he must not stay behind. If he did, he was sure that his mother would come after him or send Sir Joseph. He supposed that he, with his reputation for practical ability, would have to look after his cousin and the luggage on the homeward journey. He doubted if he had enough money. Of course he had brought plenty, having wisely prepared himself for any contingency; but only the day before, he had lent £50 to Mr Sebastian Archer, who was expecting money from Paris and New York. It had been so pleasant to be able to oblige this charming friend. Now for a moment it seemed foolish to have lent such a sum to a slippery customer. But he could not distrust Sebastian. He would be paid some day. Meanwhile he would go, and encourage his cousin in his wise purpose of departure. He found him packing his portmanteau with a kind of fury. "Irvie," he said, with a false

air of exhilaration, "you are perfectly right. I am sure of it."

"Why?" asked Irvine, looking up suspiciously from his labours.

"Have you told Miss Archer?"

"No. What has that to do with it?" asked the packer, defiantly, as he ruthlessly crammed down his shirts.

"Nothing, of course," cried the diplomatist. Dale's shoulders went up to his ears, but whether in contempt or in the labour of compression, it was impossible to decide. Harefel betook himself to his own room, and sat down in a most dismal mood to write the letter which should bear to Islay Place the glorious news of his triumphant success.

"You have been too clever for me," murmured the great Sebastian to his young friend, as the carriage stood ready at the door.

"Who? I?" asked Ned, with a slight blush.

"You are carrying him off."

The young diplomatist started. It struck him that it was he who was being carried off. Irvine stood fuming at the delay. He had said good-bye to Miss Archer, kindly, nervously, with an awkward laugh. He felt a fool, standing in the midst of an Italian crowd, who seemed to have nothing

to do but to take a happy interest in the small events of life. A race of small boys, who haunt the small Amalfi quay, gathered round the carriage, all of one size, all with wide grins and white teeth, brown faces under tattered caps. One stood on his hands before Mr Dale, while his friend pointed out the phenomenon and demanded payment. Another, more round and jovial than his comrades, cried shrilly that he was dead with hunger, and the rest took up the burden of his dirge. Some danced before the horses; some crawled under the carriage; all nimbly avoiding the whip of the driver, and careless of the apoplexy which he called down upon them. A dignified leave-taking was impossible. "Come on!" cried Irvine, with one foot on the step.

"I won't forget my debt," said Sebastian, selecting a cigar, "and I trust you to keep my secret. You have triumphed, and can afford to be generous."

Ned wrung his hand for answer. "I hope we shall see you in England soon," he said.

"Take care," said the other softly, and smiling under his blond moustache.

"Come on!" cried Irvine, impatiently, as he leapt into the carriage. "Good-bye."

“Good-bye;” and with a spring and a rattle, a scramble of horses and encouraging cry of the coachman, the two young men were borne away.

The road from Amalfi to Salerno winds on the side of rounded hills, which slope abruptly down into the sea. The hills were doubly beautiful in the fresh light of morning and the fresh green of spring. The sea was trembling with light, save where, far off, there hung a luminous, vague mist, which might veil the island of the Sirens. Everywhere was rest, but not deathlike—rest full of little movements, as the night is full of little sounds. There is no lovelier road in the world; but the young travellers from Amalfi cared not a jot about it. Harefel made a conscientious effort to note the beauties of the view. Dale, when he noticed it at all, was irritated by its insolent perfection. Nature, whom the young of a poetic turn invoke to comfort them, shows herself sometimes strangely indifferent to their moods. It was no satisfaction to Mr Irvine Dale to consider that on that morning she might be sympathising with some other young person.

CHAPTER X.

"BRIGHT SMOKE, COLD FIRE."

So the mission of Mr Edward Harefel was successful, and Miss Archer was left alone with her father. She found it hard to begin her usual studies. When friends depart in the morning, they leave the day disjointed. Marion had a little card stuck in the frame of her looking-glass, and on the card the hours were neatly marked, and each hour had its appointed task. When some irrevocable hour went by, and its special task had not been done, the studious young lady suffered the pangs of remorse. These pangs recurred on an average once a-week. For some six days she would be punctual and regular as a nun in her cell. On the seventh she forgot or she rebelled. Either a dream possessed her, and she wandered into a land where time is not; or, seized by sudden emotion, she

turned fiercely on her self-imposed bonds, loathed her prim little card, and gave herself up to the passionate desire of a wider or higher life. She was always duly contrite for the indulgence of her imagination or her ambition. Her business was with exercises of the voice, strengthening a note, gaining certainty and flexibility, and with the learning of many languages, the study of many literatures. By double portions of these occupations, the young lady punished herself for hours of forgetfulness or fits of passion.

There seemed to Miss Archer no good reason why the routine of work should be interfered with by the departure of two young men. Indeed it was the removal of a disturbing cause. She would work the better on that day of leave-taking. Her argument was unanswerable, but she found it hard to keep her thoughts at home. She caught herself again and again speculating on the character and prospects of Irvine Dale. It seemed strange that she was so sure of success in life, and he so doubtful. Yet she was a girl, and he was a man; she was poor, and he was rich. Clever, young, handsome, and wealthy, he seemed to go open-eyed, uncertain, resentful, towards failure; while she—well, if she could not control her wandering

thoughts, she would fail too. What was this young man to her? What? She did not answer the question. She turned from it with indignation. Her maiden thoughts were impatient of this intrusion. She was not accustomed to the society of young men. She was interested by Irvine's talk, and irritated by his perplexities. She was the more irritated that she could not banish him at will from her mind. Who was he, that he should come between her and her Beethoven? If there was a more tender feeling in her heart, she did not recognise it. There are places even in her own heart where a young girl, reared in healthy air, does not pry too closely. It was certainly to the credit of Mr Sebastian Archer, who had seen many cities and ways of men, that he had kept his daughter always in the purer air.

Miss Marion Archer was restless at her work. She said to herself that she would not think of Irvine, and so thought the more. She got up and walked about. It was no use. She heard her father's slow, firm footfall, and slipped away to her own room. There she gave herself to certain thoughts which she could not banish. It were better, she thought, to get them over and go back to her work. So she seated herself resolutely be-

fore the glass, and looked at her reflection critically. She gently rubbed her cheek, and saw the warm colour rise under the clear, pale skin. She felt the outline of her lips and chin. Then she leaned her head upon her hand, and considered whether she was beautiful. She looked calmly into the great eyes which looked back at her from the glass, and saw the great tears gather slowly. Her quick, light hands began to unbind the smooth coils of hair, which presently fell round her shoulders bright and abundant. Yes, she was beautiful—more beautiful than she had ever thought before. There was a finer touch added to her face, which her artistic eye appreciated—some token of deeper feeling or extended vision. There flashed on her a speech of her quaint, old music-master of Florence—a speech which, heard with the ears only, and answered with a careless smile, now suddenly became significant. “A sweet voice,” he had said, nodding his old head; “the rest will come. You should have a romance, my child—if possible, a disappointment.” Had it come to her, that romance, which the monkey-like old man had prescribed? If it had, it was vastly inferior to those operatic romances which glow and grow lofty to music. It was music which made all things great,

and made our petty feelings divine. Her mission was to sing. She was glad of her beauty, for it was a point in her favour. This young man had thought her beautiful; and the world would think so too. This mirrored vision of herself was a fine picture of sorrow. It would be effective on the stage. There was a handful of spring flowers beside her; and she began to weave them in her hair. As her hands moved deftly at their work, her sad lips began to murmur softly a sweet air proper to Ophelia. She had moved this wayward youth strangely by her singing; so might she move the world. She fancied that there really was some new quality in her voice. She enjoyed the joy of others, who, led by her in days to come, would feel the pathos of such a situation. At length she got up quickly. She had thought too much about such matters. She betook herself to practice, and worked sternly and steadily at the tasks appointed for the day.

Not many days later Miss Archer was the subject of conversation at Islay Place. The young ambassador's despatches had arrived and had fluttered the family doves.

"Don't tell me," said Sir Joseph. This was a favourite phrase of Sir Joseph Harefel. "Don't

tell me that a daughter of Sebastian Archer would refuse a young man of fortune." He looked for contradiction.

"A most lucky escape for poor Irvie," said Lady Harefel, placidly, and conscious that a sound remark lost nothing by repetition.

Miss Susan said nothing, but softly shook her head. She knew that it was possible for a woman to refuse an eligible offer. It was the privilege of the sex to sacrifice themselves. Of course, Miss Archer loved Irvine deeply; but it might well be that she had sacrificed her love to her art. She could so well understand this girl, whom she had never seen — a girl so interesting to the poetic temperament. She, at least, would welcome Irvine with intelligent sympathy. She would console him, and win him to speak of his bitter disappointment. She would dry his tears—the tears of the poetic temperament. Thus Miss Susan Harefel allowed her fancy to wander, until her inquiring glance rested on two young people, who were also adding something to the interest of her life. Miss Katharine Adare was talking in her most sprightly manner to Captain Loyd, who, in spite of Ned's absence, had come to stay at Islay Place for Easter, and seemed in no hurry to go. Miss Katharine

had walked from her home with a message from her mother to Miss Susan. Flushed by the walk, and apparently in the gayest spirits, she was listening to a long story of the gallant captain. Yet she lost none of the talk about her, nor any extract from the important letter which they were discussing.

"You may rely upon it," said Sir Joseph, disappointed of verbal contradiction, and again employing a well-used phrase—"you may rely upon it that Ned showed him the folly of the thing. And Irvine will come back and settle down. That is what he needs, to settle down—to make a prudent marriage."

Miss Katharine shuddered as she heard him, and bit her lip.

"What is the matter?" asked the Captain, breaking short the story of his dog Toto and Mrs Pounceby's parrot.

"Nothing," answered the young lady; "and what did the parrot say, then?"

She had never treated the great soldier with so much favour. When he had finished the tale of Toto, she began to laugh at him for his want of romance. She advised him to pursue the study in Italy. She pictured him draped in a cloak and

fingering a mandoline. "You know Mr Dale, the hero of Sir Joseph's story?" she asked, carelessly.

"I should think I did know him. He punched my head once;" and he proceeded with much artlessness to tell the tale of the great library row at Murray's. She was as much amused as if she heard the story for the first time. Indeed she was so frank and charming, or at least so far less distant than usual, that she left the honest gentleman much pleased with himself, and very much pleased with her. He even began to think of selling some of his horses. Katharine walked homeward, bearing a loving note from Miss Harefel to her dearest Mrs Adare. She held her head higher than usual, and she walked more proudly. Her cheek was flushed and her lips lightly pressed together.

"And they say that we women are changeable," she kept saying to her own heart.

Meanwhile Mr Irvine Dale, who gave much trouble to many people, was pursuing his homeward course in a painfully capricious manner. He was discontented with everything—with himself most of all. Well-born, rich, handsome in the eyes of some people, who were not offended by an over-eager and often fretful expression, he had, as Sir Joseph and his lady constantly agreed, a great deal

to be thankful for. And yet he was not thankful—now blaming himself for his discontent, now railing at the utter inadequacy of these external goods. It seemed the irony of fortune to heap these things on him. He was not an agreeable travelling-companion, for the most part silent, alternately wilful and indifferent. Nor was Ned Harefel in his usual spirits. The triumphant envoy was like a schoolboy returning from a delightful holiday. The gay Neapolitans shivered in the presence of these young islanders, who were cold and still as the classic fragments in the museum.

"Let us get on," said Ned, who was always thinking how near they were to Amalfi.

"It is all one to me," answered Irvine, with a regretful glance at a Greek vase, which he knew he should enjoy, if he could enjoy anything.

So they went onward to Rome. Here Irvine flashed into rage against all tourists, declared that no idea of the place could be gained in less than six months, and that therefore it was absurd to stay more than one night. Together, the two young men stared from the Pincio, as the sun set behind the distant hills. They marked the great stone-pine stand black and stately against a sky of dull, deep gold; and wondered at the one dome of

the world—the majestic crown of the most storied city of men.

“Let us get on,” cried Irvine, as he turned sharply away.

“All right,” said Ned, who felt the air grow cold.

The next morning they left Rome, and Irvine’s mood changed. He began to hang on his cousin like a weight, and to suggest delays. He must turn aside to Perugia. Having mounted to that ancient town, he seemed to care little about it. Yet he was averse from going farther. He wandered about that city on the hill, which stands a remnant of medieval Italy, grim, stately, and beautiful. A child of the restless, self-questioning present, he found strange comfort in dark, narrow streets, under strong walls of fortress-palaces, stiff arches, and tall towers. Gorgeous stuffs and shining arms had made those dark streets gay; the clink of swords, the cries of hostile houses, the tramp of heavy horses under steel-clad knights. Blood had flowed down the steep way, and splashed against the sullen walls. Now lovers, warriors, men-at-arms had passed away, with scarlet and gold and blare of trumpets, and sudden frays and hot-blooded crimes, and deeds of daring and chiv-

alry. And the women had gone, with their slow step and calm, deep-bosomed beauty, queens clad in heavy robes; and with them the painter, who has made his town so famous, he who saw the cardinal virtues as young men in wonderful wrought armour, golden and plumed, as angel-warriors whom no dust of battle may taint nor time destroy. All have gone, and left the strong-built city to a weaker race,—to the simple native, who knocks out a little frivolous window in the stern Gothic wall of the Palazzo Publico; to the roaming London cit thinking of stocks, and baggy at the knee; to his lean daughter, dowdy of tint and uncertain of step; to Irvine Dale, trying to comprehend everything past and present, and crying bitterly in his heart that it is all vanity and vexation.

He lounged for hours on a low wall, from which the ground slanted steeply down, and stared southward across the broad, rich plain to the long purple hills, beyond which was Rome.

Harefel humoured his cousin as the victim of a temporary mania—a kind of love-sickness. He found him one day in his accustomed place staring at the open country, across which lay a wide sea of sunlight; while farther off, about the hills, hung

a great black cloud, and the air was growing dull before the storm.

"Come, old fellow, you will make yourself ill," he said.

Dale leaned against him wearily, but made no answer.

"Do you want to go back to Amalfi?" asked Harefel, suddenly.

"No, no, no!" cried Dale, springing up.

"You must not think any more of her," said Ned.

"I was not thinking of her."

"She is a selfish young woman, not worthy of you," suggested Ned, tentatively.

"Not worthy of me!" cried Irvine, in a fine tone of mockery. "A worthy fellow am I, in truth! Why, if I ever do anything worth doing," he went on, convincing himself by the warmth of his own language, "it will be because I have known her. There is a girl, who does not care for money, or fashion, or marriage, or any of the stuff that other women live for—a girl who only tries to improve herself. If I can, I will imitate her. We will leave this place to-night. Come on and pack. We can be in England in three days, and I will go back to Oxford and see if I can't get

at something. If she can make something of herself, why cannot I? I am a man, or ought to be. Why should not I cultivate myself into somebody, as well as a slip of a girl with a shady father?"

To this final question no immediate answer could be given.

"All right," said Harefel, with a provoking absence of enthusiasm; and as some heavy drops began to fall, they went hastily to their hotel.



PART III.

CHAPTER XI.

"A KIND OF YESTY COLLECTION."

"So you are going in for culture," said Kerisen, sitting lightly on the arm of an easy-chair in Dale's lodgings at Oxford. He smiled as he said it—a smile pleasant in spite of mockery.

"I am going to try to be less of a fool," said Dale, laughing. Since he reached England, Irvine had been in a mood unusually robust. Fresh from the brown hues of Tuscany and the level plains of France, he looked on the rounded hills and wooded valleys of England as on a new world. Everywhere was tender green under white fleecy clouds. All foreign parts seemed to his memory but glare and dust. The childhood of the year filled him with joy and hope. He, too, was a child. It should not be his fault if the man were not worth something. Thus it happened, that while his

family believed that only some shreds of worldly wisdom and a special envoy had saved the youth from a rash marriage; while Miss Susan cherished the dear belief that he hid a broken heart beneath his feverish gaiety; while Ned himself kept watch anxiously on his cousin,—Mr Irvine Dale, with his thoughts bent on the future, and a fresh growth of hope in his heart, was intent on making himself a more complete man. He was at Oxford again, an undergraduate among undergraduates, but for the most part indifferent to their aims. He had but one thing to do, to cultivate himself into somebody worthy to live.

“I don’t think much of Oxford culture,” observed Kerisen, who had won all sorts of university honours, and carried them lightly, and who was a non-resident fellow of an idle college. “I know what you will find it,” he added: “Taylorian institute; hours in the Bodleian; walks round the parks; talks round the tea-table; discovery of lads of promise who listen to you, of lads of money who do up their rooms; the classical; the pseudo-classical; the Renaissance; the renascence; Gothic; Queen Ann; the Greek drama; the last burlesque in London; Antigone, and Polly Darvel. They don’t do the thing well in Oxford.”

Dale only smiled tolerant of his friend's manner of speech, and Kerisen, as he got up to go, added, "I am up till Monday. Come and dine on Friday, and you shall meet the cream of the cultured. There will be about six men, and you can take one each day next week, and walk him round the parks." It was a chance not to be lost. Irvine accepted with gratitude. "I shall tell each man privately that you need his influence," said Kerisen, and so departed with a nod.

Friday evening came, and Dale sought his friend's dinner-party with lively curiosity. They dined in the Little Common-room—an interesting party truly. There was Manvers, the Union orator, frowning at his soup as one who scorned the indulgence of the baser appetites. There was the young poet Farwood, slim of figure, with a habit of suddenly inflating his chest and pushing back his hay-coloured hair. Always inseparable, those two young dons Blossett of Christopher's and Jones of St James's were exchanging confidences about a fender. Young Cranley, with youthful eyes fixed on Kerisen, whom he revered as a model, was trying hard to seem as old as he really was. Finally, there was Blogg, who had read Voltaire. Heterodoxy, epigram, paradox, were child's-

play to Blogg. He rejoiced in a terrible reputation for infidelity, but even this enjoyment was taken sadly. He was said to be acquainted with all creeds, and to keep them all in pigeon-holes. If he were suspected of any superstition, it was of an amiable weakness for the mysteries of Isis and the turning of tables.

At dinner the talk was slow. Now and then a remark was dropped shyly, and each man seemed to lie in wait for his neighbour. Cranley was particularly cautious, looking for Kerisen's approval when he ventured to place a word, and embarrassed by his own smiles. When his model spoke—and he started all the topics with cynical indifference—the young disciple looked round proudly, felt more of a man, and leaned back with his innocent eyes half-closed, as if in the privileged enjoyment of a peculiar aroma. So the dinner was eaten, and the talk was slow. But when the same party were gathered in Kerisen's handsome room, and the wine was on the table, and the couches spread, caution was somewhat forgotten, and the guests dared to shine.

"Your room is a poem," murmured the recumbent Jones, feeding his eyes on harmonies and shaded lights.

"Don't be so hard on the room," said Farwood, faintly—Farwood himself a poet.

"He did not mean one of your poems," said the orator Manvers, in his heavy manner. No man ever knew when Manvers meant to joke.

"Union repartee," was the comment of Blossett, contracting his eyebrows as though in pain, but not looking up from the portfolio of rare engravings which he tasted.

"You may sneer at the Union," began Manvers, in argumentative tone, "but let me tell you——"

"That it is the only place for a speech," said Kerisen, quickly; and added, "Wine for the orator, or he will attack us about University Reform." Cranley looked for applause, and everybody smiled, except Manvers, who was heard to grumble something about the importance of the subject.

"To the abuses of Oxford!" said Jones, raising his glass of claret.

"Idle fellowships!" cried Cranley, and blushed to find that his words were followed by silence. How he suffered from that fatal habit of blushing! Men of the world do not blush.

Manvers was nursing a grievance, and drinking wine with a somewhat bitter expression. He crossed his arms, and thought of Danton at a fes-

tival of Girondists. Nevertheless the talk grew brisker.

"Look at this thing of Raphael," said Blossett, with his pained expression, to the recumbent Jones.

"Take it away," said Jones; "I cannot bear the decadence."

Meanwhile Blogg was explaining a system of philosophy which he had invented that morning. Cranley was listening open-mouthed; Kerisen was throwing in remarks on all sides and all subjects; and through all the babble came the monotonous chant of Farwood, who was reciting the last unpublished poem of the great Maximilian Darley. Like Manvers, Dale was silent and indignant. He could see nothing in these people but a strong desire of display; and Oxford seemed to him, in his anger, a mere hotbed of conceit. If these folk were the fruit of university culture, he would cultivate himself elsewhere. In the course of the evening, when conversation flagged, Manvers, who had waited long for his opportunity, struck in with some remarks on university Reform.

"A good school of art is what we want," said Blossett.

"And of cookery," suggested Kerisen.

"The subject of Oxford is disgusting," said Jones, severely. "I am sick of everything Gothic," and he turned his cushion.

"The place should be rebuilt in the style of Queen Anne," pronounced Blossett, firmly. "We have one excellent model in the place; and," he added, wagging his head at Manvers, "the Union ought to be abolished."

"Let me tell you that you had better abolish the university," cried the orator, hotly. "It is the great privilege of this place that a man may speak out frankly and freely what he believes."

"Believes!" echoed Blogg, faintly.

"What he believes, sir," repeated Manvers. "I hold that a man is no worse for believing in duty and in God."

A shudder went round the assembly.

"A great deal better, no doubt," said Blogg, with a sweet smile.

"Come, don't let us be frivolous," said Kerisen.

Cranley laughed, and said, "We must talk of something more serious than theology, eh, Kerisen?"

"Cranley," observed his mentor, in a vexed tone, "that sort of observation does not suit you. It is like hearing blasphemy from a baby."

There was faint laughter as Cranley blushed furiously and tried to smile. He was the only son of a quiet country clergyman, and this verbal dissipation was new to him.

"It is curious," said Blogg, in a meditative manner, "how words remain in use when they have long ceased to mean anything. Manvers never says anything but 'Duty' and 'God,' and yet with him they are merely rhetorical expressions, mouth-filling words. It is very curious."

Perhaps it was fortunate that Manvers did not hear him, having been irritated into a vehement oration by Blossett's definition of morality as the art of spreading pleasure thin; while all hearing was rendered difficult by Farwood, whose voice was gradually rising like the moaning of the wind. Jones was lulled to a state of semi-consciousness by the monotonous voice of the poet, who hung his head on one side as he prolonged the ever-recurring refrain—

"And the moonlight was white on her white body."

"Good—that is good," muttered the auditor, settling himself anew among the cushions. "Kerisen, may I have a brandy-and-soda?"

"Ruthven refused to publish that poem in the

Magazine," said Farwood, looking round, as one who announces a portent.

"Ruthven is a fat man," said Blossett, and buried his face in a foaming tumbler.

"He has a mahogany sideboard," said Jones, nervously loosening the wire of a cork.

"You can't expect a great healthy man like that to care about literature," observed Kerisen, who was terribly fond of mockery.

"It seems likely that he rejected those verses of Farwood's on the ground of indecency," began Manvers. "Now the true art of poetry I take to be——"

"To produce the most luxurious narcotic," said Blossett, interrupting.

"I am bound to go," said Manvers, who had been too often balked.

"The call of duty," suggested Blossett, sweetly.

After brief leave-taking the orator stalked forth into the night. Kerisen was heartily tired of his party.

"It is time for boys to be in bed," he said to Cranley. Then drawing Farwood aside, he mentioned to him that the bashful youth was a great admirer of his poetry; and so sent the two off together.

"I must resign this sofa sooner or later," said Jones. "Blossy, your hand." He departed leaning on his friend's shoulder.

"Come and see me next week, if I am still alive," said Blogg, as he huddled on his gown. He was fond of hinting at suicide.

When they had all gone, Kerisen pulled back the curtain, and flung open the window. The cold night air came softly in, to find the scent of apples, musk, wine, and cigarette.

"What do you think of them?" asked the host.

"Think of them!" cried Irvine, giving vent to his feelings; "I think they are a set of egotistical, shy, attitudinising humbugs."

"Good enough fellows, as fellows go," remarked Kerisen; and he added, "Models of culture."

"If that is culture," said Dale, solemnly, "give me stone-breaking for choice."

"They don't do the thing well in Oxford," Kerisen admitted. "Come to me in London at any time. Drop a line, and come. I will show you the real thing—the men whom these men imitate; Maxwelton, and Bush, and Tagus Robinson, and Maximilian Darley, and other real lions. You shall see them in their dens, and at their ease. These Oxonian cubs are never at their ease."

Irvine Dale, walking homeward down the street, where his footfall sounded loud in the stillness, hurled fierce epithets against the men with whom he had passed the evening. It seemed useless to seek culture among the old grey walls and deep green gardens of Oxford. He had no wish to be like Jones or Blossett. To make himself a Blogg and die, seemed a poor prospect. On a sudden came an idea which brought him to a standstill. The great thought had come to him, as to other restless youth. He would shut himself up, and learn German.

CHAPTER XII.

A LETTER FROM LONDON.

IRVINE DALE was not always in a bad temper. Sometimes his youth rebelled against him, and he was half ashamed to find that he had enjoyed himself foolishly. A pull down the river in sunshine and shade, a plunge below the weir, a supper at the inn, were small matters to make a rational being happy; but when he enjoyed such things, Irvine enjoyed them more thoroughly than his fellows. He rowed like a hero, and talked as he rowed, and chaffed his companions, until his utterances grew so extravagant and fantastical, that they stared at him in astonishment. Then, in the midst of his absurdities, he became suddenly conscious of the barrier between him and them, and was unutterably gloomy for five minutes, toiling harder at the oar. Sometimes he lay on the warm

grass within the college walls, and talked with other men ; and sometimes he was seen at wines, and even at supper-parties. But for the most part he lived alone, resisting his cousin's efforts to make him sociable. He was neither popular nor unpopular. Many men had been angry at his curt refusal to play in the eleven ; but his general conduct and Harefel's popularity had persuaded them to ascribe his want of patriotism to eccentricity, and they dismissed him with the remark that "he would not be a bad fellow if he were not so cracked." Undergraduates of all types and classes who were able to matriculate were gathered in the college, which was gaining a name for enlightenment. Among these there were many who envied Dale's reputation for peculiarity, hinted that he was affected, and dissented from the popular belief that he could do anything if he chose ; while there were others who exalted him into a hero, and strove to emulate his indifference to a university career. The dons agreed in regarding his theory of education for education's sake as a mere cloak for idleness ; but the Dean, who both enjoyed and valued a variety of characters, regarded him as a useful element, and allowed him unusual liberty. So Irvine Dale lived through the summer term—

sometimes extravagantly gay as a boy among boys, sometimes deeply depressed, but more often passing from day to day in a mood of gentle melancholy, roaming over the uplands, and diving into green clefts between the hills, or sitting at home with a pile of German books. This study of German gave him for a time a definite occupation, which was sweetened by the vague expectation of becoming somebody wholly different when he had mastered the language. Yet it was hard to master. Sometimes he pushed away his grammar, and let his hands fall in his lap, while he travelled the old dull round of disbelief in the usefulness of his work, and disbelief in his ability to do it. It were easier enough to do nothing, and perhaps he was fit for nothing better. Sometimes he was pathetically conscious of his loneliness, and fancied the boats flashing up and down the river with shouting and laughing, and bright colours in the slanting sunlight of evening. His fellows were no whit less happy because he was alone. His happiness was of no consequence. He had no parents, no brother, no friend. He was irritated with his old Eton companions, who cared so little for his company. Surely they might have borne a little more even though he had been short and rude to them. It

was true that Harefel still came to him; but he came with an air of propitiation, which was infinitely provoking. He was too considerate, and too diplomatic. It was impossible to sting him, and impossible not to try. Dale was warmly, almost passionately, fond of his good friend and cousin; but at times he almost hated him for his patience and his popularity. In these moods of depression his thoughts constantly turned towards Amalfi, and he felt a strange yearning which surprised him. He had forgotten all his little worries, and thought that he had been for a few short days wholly happy. It seemed as if the memory of Miss Archer lay ever in wait for his weaker moments. In loneliness and sorrow he turned to her for comfort and guidance. He wanted to ask her how she was so contented in the quiet improvement of herself. Yet, pleasant as it was to fancy her singing amid the lemon-trees—a maiden student—he never even thought of going back to see the picture. His business was with the German grammar.

One day he sat at breakfast in his lodgings. The morning was fair, and youth was rebellious within him. There was to be a festive cricket-match; Harefel had begged him to play, and he had refused

curtly, on the score of duty. Now he was not sure about his duty ; he was sorry that he had been curt : it was a splendid day for cricket, the morning was fair, and youth was rebellious within him. Suddenly the face of Leonard Aubrey appeared at the window. " You are coming to play," said he, so entirely ignoring his neighbour's crotchets that it was impossible to be offended. " If I come in, will you give me some jam?" And without waiting for an answer he came head foremost over the window-sill. Irvine laughed, and pointed to the jam-pot.

" I have brought you two letters from college. Swear that you will play, or you shall not have them. Forgive my spreading it thick. I am extravagantly fond of strawberry-jam."

" But my German," objected Irvine.

" Your German !" cried Leonard, with a big bite out of a thick slice. " What is the good of being able to grumble in two languages?" Irvine laughed, and was very near surrender.

" A fine language for a grumble, I admit," said the other. " Come, my son, and play, regardless of your doom. Be a little victim ; jam and sunshine ; light and sweetness ; the teaching of nature ; both letters are from female hands : come, surrender, read, and be happy."

“Well, I will come,” said the German student, and Leonard threw him his letters. On the one envelope appeared the neat pointed writing of Lady Harefel ; on the other, the straggling spasmodic characters of Miss Susan. Of course he opened his aunt Ellen’s letter first. He began to read with a smile, at once kindly and a little contemptuous, but the smile vanished as his interest increased.

“MY DEAREST IRVIE,—We have heard nothing of you for so long a time, that your uncle and myself are quite anxious. Ned writes regularly every Sunday, like a dear good boy as he is, but he has not said much about you lately—not from any want of interest, I am sure, but he seems very busy with his boating and other games ; and I do hope he does not neglect his books, as I am sure is not the case with you. I do hope that you are prudent this trying weather. The doctors all agree that it is most *treacherous* weather. It feels warm, but it is chilly. Poor Lady Barkdale has all her children down with the whooping-cough. You had it at school, but I was never quite convinced of your whooping, though Miss Murray said that she heard you, and I am sure that she would not willingly be mistaken in so important a matter. I am in despair

about my second housemaid, who, after being with me ten years, is going away to be married. I spoke very strongly to her about the impropriety of her conduct,—not, of course, that I mean that it is improper for a girl to marry, and the man is most respectable, and a sort of foreman of Frogling of Bond Street ; but to leave me after *ten years*, is too bad. Talking of marriages, there is no girl out this year who is half so much admired as Katharine Adare, although she has no fortune. As your uncle says, ‘All is not gold that glitters.’ He admires and likes her extremely. He is very busy with his parliamentary affairs. He is going to speak on Friday when the great debate about the Importation of French Eggs comes on. The Prime Minister spoke to him last night at Lady Dunduffy’s. All her plain girls are out now, and not one pretty, which is very sad for her, as Lord Dunduffy is living very far beyond his means. Your uncle shakes his head, and says that it must end in the workhouse ; but, I do hope, not so bad as that. Beatrix Louder has run away with Ryder Twinkleton. It is really awful to see these things happening every day. You know that it is actually said that Lord Errison will take his wife back. These fast married women are such bad style, and the girls are

not much better. Of course I am not thinking of Katharine; for nobody could be nicer than her in every way, and yet she gets all the admiration which shows that men do not really like the horrid fast girls. Captain Loyd follows her everywhere; and Lord Humphrey Durfey, who used not to go much into *nice* society, is most attentive. I only mention this because you are such old friends. There was quite a commotion at Burhill House on Monday, where she wore her hair in a new way. Your funny friend, young Mr Aubrey, would have said that the Chinese ambassador was quite out of the running. Mr Zarza Parilla, who belongs to one of the legations, and is very handsome in an Eastern style, though too Jewish-looking for my taste—but I daresay that is a prejudice—is wild about her. Mrs Adare is in ecstasies, but more absent than ever. I have advised her to see Dr Legsome, who did wonders for old Lord Daly's gout. She said such pretty things about you, and let out in a dreamy way that she used to want you for a son. She said that you are so unlike the young men of the day—and that, I am sure, is true—and that Katharine is quite provoked with their airs and graces. Why don't you come to town, and see something of the season? Mrs Adare says that to mix

in good society prevents a young man from getting entangled with inferior people; and really, as Sir Joseph says, why should we cast pearls before swine. Of course I know, dear Irvine, that your taste and principle will always preserve you from an unworthy alliance; but still, one cannot be too careful. I am sure that, if you come to town, Katharine will be glad to see her old friend again, and so shall we all be. Sir Joseph sends his love. He was on his way to the House, and has just stepped back to say that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, which I am sure is true. I do wish this French Egg discussion was off his mind. Good-bye, dear Irvie; do not be imprudent, and come to us whenever you can.—Your very affectionate aunt, ELLEN HAREFEL.”

When Irvine had read this long letter, he put it quickly into his pocket, and tore open that of his other aunt. Miss Susan's writing was tremulous, and seemed to hurry and stumble forward in eagerness to meet her nephew's eye:—

“DEAR IRVINE,—A line in haste! I dare not let the post go without a word. I dare not think what dear Ellen has been writing to you. Adeline Adare

is my dearest friend—she so thoroughly understands me ; but you know her fits of absence. She said something about you, and Ellen caught it up, and has written. I don't know what to say, but I know how sensitive you are, and how you will be wounded by what seems a want of delicacy in dear Adeline Adare. She is so unguarded and open. You must forgive her. I think that Katharine would die if she knew what had been said. I am afraid that I have not said what I meant, but I could not let the post go. Barnes is waiting for the letter. I do so well know that these things should not be spoken about. I do feel for you.—Your loving aunt,

“S. HAREFEL.”

“*P.S.*—You must not think from this that we don't *all* want you to come to London. It seems but yesterday that you and she were playing as children ; and now—but I must not say it.”

Irvine laughed as he thrust the second letter into his pocket, and Aubrey, looking up from his jam and morning paper, could not withhold a whistle of surprise. Dale jumped up to hide his confusion. His heart was strangely quiet ; he was full of a trouble which was half pleasant.

Beyond the disquiet of the moment, he saw growing larger and surer a great joy. No more tossing at the will of the waves; no more doubting whether to go—for there was the beacon-light, and it was the light of home. No more to follow wandering fires. Out, out, brief candle! for is not the sun mounting high in heaven? is not the morning come?

"Is it settled that we may go down to-morrow?" asked Dale.

"Yes," answered Leonard, staring; "but I thought you were going to stay up with your German?"

"German!" cried Dale, who had passed at one bound to a world where all languages are inadequate. So he chucked his grammar on to a shelf, and cried, "*Auf wiedersehen!*"

CHAPTER XIII.

HOLIDAY.

"Boys and girls, come out to play," sang Leonard Aubrey, under Ned Harefel's window. "The Solitary from the lonesome vale will join our rustic sports. 'Tis time; descend." And Harefel descended, eager for cricket; and friends came with him, and the morning was fair, and life was better than books. And Irvine went among his comrades, young and forgetful of problems, and in his heart a song which was for his heart only. So they went altogether with laughter and foolish talk, and found the wickets pitched, and all things ready for play.

Irvine lay on the short warm grass in the glory of youth and of white flannel, lazily watching the men at the wickets, and thinking of a certain house in a London street. It is a street of many houses,

and most of them are ugly, each in its peculiar style. Yet it is a pleasant place, far pleasanter in its variety than any long, formal, dead-alive line of mansions elegantly stuccoed. In it there are dwellings of all dimensions. At the corner is the Duke of Ruffborough's stately palace, which claims to be part of the square, to which it turns the cold shoulder. Next in size is No. 27A, a grand old dwelling-place—red brick relieved by stone—with tall iron railings decorously florid; and stiff extinguishers, where the vanished race of link-boys quenched their torches. There, in the days of gas and scientific progress, dwells the distinguished Dr Janders, who cures all ills by a system of coloured glasses and sunlight. The *bijou* residence of Mrs Midelmass Duff seems crushed between the noble mansion of Tertius Goll, the great financier, and the ancestral home of the De Bentyre family. Houses of all sizes and shapes, and among them all none more modest than that whither Irvine's fancy has fled. A quiet dwelling: rather small, on the very rare occasions when the three boys are in London; but more than large enough for a mother and daughter. The afternoon sunlight slants into the street; the brougham is at the door; and a girl in fair, fresh raiment, a young

huntress with burnished weapons, sweeps laughing down the stairs. Such is the picture seen by the young man who lies on the grass by far-off Oxford. She laughs too much, he thinks. She is heart-whole. It is desecration to believe that this stately maiden could care for him. He sees the well-known street full of admirers bearing cards, hears the bang of hansom doors flung open, and patent-leather boots are twinkling on the pavement. It cannot be that she is cold to these splendid youth with curled brims and exquisite flowers. They dance divinely, and know what everybody is doing; and is she not a woman and weak? And yet—and at this point his thoughts go always back to the past. He remembers the little girl with the sweet bright face and ruffled hair; now dancing and laughing in the sunlight—now leaving her play to woo him from a naughty temper. He remembers her, shy and demure, by the side of her governess, when he came home from school, and how quickly that shyness vanished in her eagerness for fun. He recalls his intense pride when first they rode their ponies together, and she was trusted to him. He smiles at his boyish shyness as he grew conscious of her beauty. His smile is more tender as he pictures her visiting her quaint

friends in the little village: no formal visitor, conscious of her condescension, but a young girl, bringing her glad spirits and kind heart to those less happy; hearing their strange tales and comments with pity and amusement. He remembers with a flush of shame how he, in a fretful super-subtle mood, had quarrelled with her for not taking a more serious view of charity, and for enjoying her good works. She was too good for him. It was impossible that she should care for him. And yet if she could, he would grow more worthy of her. He was thrilled by the hope of being worthy to be loved. After all, was he so utterly unworthy of a young lady in society? It was absurd to undervalue one's self. She loved him, and that was enough. And yet she could not love him. Of one thing he was certain—he had always loved her. All the suppressed chivalry within him rose up to assure him of this. He had loved first. If he might dare to hope that she cared for him! Come what might, he should always love her, and no other. It was impossible that she should care for him; but she could not prevent him from caring for her. Victim of hopeless love, he yet found the world brighter and better for his love. For it was hopeless. And yet—— Here he glided

off again into the past, dreaming his dream upon the cricket-field. It was good to be young, and to understand the beauty and goodness of women. There was sunlight about him, and the laughter of friends. The world was a pleasant place, after all. He whispered a name to the grass with a glad sense of a peculiar interest. He looked at a daisy under his nose, whimsically debating if he should learn his fate therefrom, or spare the humble flower. He smiled for no reason, and sighed for no reason. He smiled again at these symptoms. O young fool, recumbent in the sunlight, there are things in the world almost as important as your love affairs.

So the summer hours went by. Irvine, summoned from his dreams, played a dashing innings, fielded with much vivacity, felt an irrational depression as the shadows lengthened, and rose again to a strange height of excitement as he went to sup at Leonard Aubrey's rooms. He was the life of the party, and all men were surprised thereat. Nor was there want of life. After a long day's cricket in the sun, the youth were healthily fatigued, and betook themselves with ardour to eating and drinking, eager for new strength, and gloriously fearless of indigestion. There was little

formality and much food. Bottles stood about with wires cut, and a fine air of irregular plenty. They spoke plainly of more to come, and the shortest arm might reach them. There was also cup in generous jugs and bowls. No white tie or dress-coat gave stiffness and solemnity to the feast; but each man wore his easiest shooting-coat, and opened his collar if he chose. There was no great noise at first. A brisk clatter of knives, forks, and plates, voices all talking at once, now and then a howl of laughter, a jest shouted above the babble of talk, prevented a depressing stillness. But as the short-lived viands vanished, the sounds grew louder. One man fell back in his place, stretched his tired legs, and gave the rein to his tongue. Another attracted the attention of an absent-minded friend by the dexterous jerking of a roll. The wag began to bring in his well-loved jokes—those jokes so much more pleasing than the newest flashes of wit. Everybody knew the sort of crisis which would bring one in, and the laughter began before the jest. It was no great matter to set that table in a roar. They roared for the joy of the roaring. Feelings were not over-sensitive that night, and personalities abounded. The singer sang, and the others shouted in chorus. Then the rival singer

sang—a Scotchman of rich mellow voice, which Burns would have loved; and the Southrons cried in chorus that they were “na fou.” Loud among the loud, wild among the wild, was Irvine Dale. When these reserved persons throw themselves to the wind, they are apt to go the farthest. A song was ended, and he dashed into a fantastic parody, which satirised, or seemed to satirise the dons. He reduced the wag to silence by a perfect hurricane of wild jokes. Ned Harefel stared at his cousin, round-eyed with astonishment; and Leonard Aubrey, master of the revels, shook with laughter till he cried out in pain. This hermit gone mad was the richest thing in all the world. The fun grew fast and furious. Eating and drinking never wholly ceased; but other sports prevailed. Who first turned from words to blows is uncertain. Perhaps it was he who flung the first bread. Certain it is, that many missiles were flying; that one had smothered his friend with sofa-cushions, another had thrust his trusty comrade under the table. A certain freedom of manners prevailed. Yet they might still sing that they were “na fou.” Flushed more with youth than wine, maddened by the joy of living, they shouted and laughed and sang, and cared not for

the morrow. A great roar of sound went out into the summer night; and the Head of the College, strolling in the quadrangle, paused to hear with a smile, both critical and appreciative. At the height of the riot, a whim seized Irvine Dale. With a wild shout of farewell, he vaulted over an intervening sofa, and dashed at the door.

“Stop him!” cried Aubrey, but too late.

With demoniac laughter, Dale dashed down the wooden stairs. In a moment they were after him. One emerged from under the sofa-cushions, another from under the table. Both singers, though bulky men, as many singers are, flung themselves in pursuit. Aubrey dashed across the table with a crash of china, scattering the remnants of his supper. The wag was nimbler than his wit. Down they all went, shouting in the chase, out into the quadrangle. The master, withdrawn behind a tree, saw the hunt sweep by, and modified his opinion of the fugitive. The fugitive tried a ruse. He dashed up a flight of stairs, left a door, which opened on to the next staircase, ostentatiously opened, doubled back, and, going softly into the rooms of an acquaintance, sported the oak. In a minute he heard the rush of feet; the chase swept by the

door, along the passage, and down the other staircase. He was alone, in silence, panting. The room in which he had taken refuge belonged to the fashionable man of the college, and the atmosphere was most soothing. Dried rose-leaves filled a china bowl; but their scent was lost in a faint odour of musk. Among furniture of sterner stuff were two or three soft low chairs, covered with Japanese silk; and near one of these stood the little tea-table, with its scant petticoat of lace. Even the box of cigarettes might have been waiting for a lady. A small stuffed bear, who supported umbrellas and canes, indicated a certain sort of humour in his owner. The engravings showed a taste for women, both saintly and decorously sensuous. Above the velvet of the mantelpiece was a long, low looking-glass, and in its Florentine frame were a few cards which had floated down from town. Above the looking-glass appeared the chief artistic ornament of the apartment—a copy in oils of one of the best-known works of Carlo Dolce. “Make my room a shrine for that picture,” young Osman Belgrave had said at his first meeting with an Oxford upholsterer. The sudden change from the riot of a supper-party to this scene of elegance and repose filled Irvine Dale with

merriment. He stared about him like a child, and noted all the pretty things.

It was clear that Osman himself had but just left his bower, for the piano was open, and on it was that chorus of enamoured costermongers which, sung by ladies with satin tights and short clay-pipes in their hat-bands, had taken the town by storm. The lamp, too, veiled by its deep pink shade, stood lighted on the table. Irvine lay back in a chair, which was almost a couch, recovering his breath, and staring about him. Presently, as his custom was, he stretched out his hand to a neighbouring newspaper. He smiled as he saw that he held the 'Court Courier,' and began lazily to turn the pages. "Approaching marriages in high life," he read with sublime indifference. Then the paper slipped on to the Persian rug at his feet. He clutched the arms of his chair, and shut his eyes tight. But though his eyes were closed, he still saw the paragraph writ plain before him.

"A marriage is arranged and will shortly take place between Lord Humphrey Durfey, son of the late and brother of the present Duke of Dorking, and Miss Katharine Adare, only daughter of the late Chilingly Combe Spenser Adare of Chilcombe Parke, near Chillingley."

Mr Osman Belgrave, entering his room a little later, was shocked to find the 'Court Courier,' which he had not yet read, lying crushed upon the floor. He smoothed the paper carefully, and, with a little cigarette between his teeth, proceeded to make himself acquainted with the doings of the fashionable world. He noted with respectful sympathy that a duke's brother, whom he had often observed in the Park, was about to be married. He was really surprised. He had never for a moment supposed that Lord Humphrey was a marrying man.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CLUB.

To sit still in Oxford was impossible. Irvine felt that he must go somewhere and do something. He could not face his cousin, and discuss the news of this approaching marriage in high life. He was very sorry for himself. He was selected from all men to be the special sport of Fortune. In the morning he was roused to the full consciousness of the one love of his life; in the evening came the 'Court Courier.' It was consummate irony. There was no rest for him. The gad-fly was at him again. He must go somewhere and do something. Thus it happened that Mr Dale, on the morning after the supper-party, was not to be found in Oxford. Term was just over, and he ignored the ceremony of taking leave. He scribbled to Lady Harefel the brief intelligence that he should not be at home for

some time. Then he fled to London, a place so large that many a small fellow may hide his sorrows therein, and knocked at Kerisen's door. In spite of all his real grief, there was some pleasure in the whimsical nature of this proceeding. To pursue his own improvement, as if no woman existed, was clearly a fine thing to do; while every day there would be the bare chance of a dramatic meeting. Would she start and turn pale? He would rise each morning, conscious that before nightfall he might meet a romantic incident—a stimulating pain. He was deeply hurt and morbidly restless. He had no strength to battle with his gad-fly. So he knocked at Kerisen's door, and Kerisen received him kindly.

A fortnight passed, and Irvine Dale was still restless and ill at ease. When he was in the house, he wished to be in the street; in the midst of the crowd, he longed for the solitude of his room. He buried himself amid the gazers in the Park, and thought how strange his feelings would be if he saw Miss Adare sweep by behind Lord Humphrey's big bay horses. But as he never saw her, he never experienced that remarkable sentiment. Once he caught sight of his aunt Ellen's fair benevolent countenance, and fled: but as that

lady was apt to doze in her carriage, his hurried flight was unnecessary. He did not gain much help from Kerisen, who appeared to him improperly flippant. He likened him to Mephistopheles, and delighted him by the comparison.

"My too inquisitive Faust!" cried Kerisen; "but where is Gretchen?"

"Where indeed!" asked Irvine, dismally — "where is the guileless maiden?"

"There are some who sell themselves for jewels," said his host, lightly, and began to hum a well-known air.

"Don't say that," cried the other, with a spasm of pain, which made Kerisen open his eyes with the sudden consciousness that his jests were ill-timed.

"Enough of women," cried he.

"Enough of women," echoed Dale, sadly.

Once certain that his friend's mind was dwelling on some unlucky fact, Kerisen did his best to divert his attention. He exercised his wit and poured forth his best stories to an ear which was often inattentive. He led the young man among lions. They dined with Maxwelton, friend of dukes and reformer of society — Maxwelton the writer, who gave to every doubt an answer solemn

and well-paid in the pages of an enlightened magazine—Maxwelton the talker most cynical and paradoxical, tolerant of all things but enthusiasm. Irvine looked for a man firm on his feet and armed at all points; he found a person trying laboriously to be at his ease, and made cross by failure. He heard the great preacher of the day denouncing a trembling waiter over his dinner at the club. He was nearly run over by a remarkable young poet, whose verse was full of languor, and who was dashing to the city to take advantage of a rise in Egyptians. He grew weary of lions. They were but skin-deep, after all, and their voice betrayed them. They were one more disappointment to the most disappointed of young men. It was in vain that Kerisen exerted himself. He took him to parties given at strange hours, for the sake of variety—to the exclusive circle of Mrs Moddell Todder, exclusive of all but notoriety, and for whose sake a real Persian was induced to recite the poetry of his nation. He took him to the Hoopman Hoboys, who, husband and wife, painted together the most beautiful pictures in the world—pictures of hidden meaning but wondrous harmony of colours—pictures which might be viewed with satisfaction from any point, sweet riddles

which the joint artists, one in art as in love, could not be induced to part with. Irvine heard young Mr Kemble Francis recite his own unpublished drama, and Mrs Tymperton perform for hours on the instrument invented by her brother. The inventor and some other persons believed that the days of the pianoforte were numbered. Irvine was jostled by critics, snubbed by painters, patronised by unsuccessful authors. And yet, in spite of the efforts of Kerisen, who was welcome everywhere, the young man was not satisfied. Even when, owing to his friend's influence, he was elected an original member of the new club, he could not feel rapture. After many a battle, the club had been decorated and furnished. Now it was open, but nameless. Fears were entertained that the name "Catholic" would not be understood, even if it were spelt with a K. "Philhellenic" had but few supporters, while "Philannic" was the suggestion of a single though influential member. "The Sympathetic" was too sentimental, the "All Round Club" too slangy. Some wished to call it "The Coffee-house," which was less definite than "The Addison;" while a small but determined band would have nothing but a most modest and distinctive title, "The Klub." "Call it Walpurgis,"

said Kerisen, "for here will we prepare the hell-broth of culture." When he made this luminous suggestion he was sitting with Dale in the newly-furnished library, which was lined throughout with dark carved oak, and lighted through diamond-panes—a very handsome reading-room, where it was difficult to read by day, and all lamps were ineffectual at night. Dale peered at his friend through the gloom. "Yesterday you talked of the mission of this place," he said, "as if it would improve art and reform society; and now you make a jest of it."

"I half believe in it, and that is a stretch of credulity for these days."

"A time of shreds and patches," said Dale, crossly.

"A time of eager inquiry and the rapid spread of enlightenment," cried Kerisen, in a bombastic tone.

"A time of universal humbug, when we all act parts which are not worth the acting."

"The times are out of joint," exclaimed Kerisen, with a player's manner, "O cursed spite! But luckily," he added, "neither you nor I were born to set them right."

Dale only answered by an impatient gesture.

"Come into the light," said his friend, and he threw open the door of the drawing-room. The sudden change made the eyes blink. The disputes about the decoration of the club had ended in a compromise. Each room was in a different style. The drawing-room had been assigned to a man of original genius, who had shut himself up with a copy of 'The Arabian Nights' and the tail-feathers of the common cock. The result was gorgeous in the extreme. Everywhere was a blending of colours burnished green, deepening to shining black—here and there a vivid touch of the scarlet of the cockscomb. Deep divans, rich stuffs, and low-swung lamps of dead gold, brought home to Western eyes an East more splendid than the real. It was a dream of Aladdin's palace made visible by art. Passing from this room, the two friends entered the passage, and looked down into the hall below. It was one step from the palace of Xerxes to the Athens which defied him. A spacious court of white marble, with exquisite slender columns, stately and simple, unfurnished save for a few classic couches. In the centre was a slight depression, a long shallow tank of the same pure marble, and in it fresh water and the gleam of goldfish. From

this fair court a voice rose, reciting in an artificial tone—

“And evermore with most variety
And change of sweetness (for all change is sweet),
He casts his glutton sense to satisfy.”

“It is Bush,” whispered Kerisen.

Dale looked down with languid interest. The distinguished gentleman was somewhat stumpy as seen from above. He lay on his elbow in a classic attitude, but with something less than classic grace; and the beautiful stanzas of Spenser flowed monotonously forth for the delight of a long-haired young gentleman, who looked as if he had fallen against a neighbouring column. Presently the artist broke off in the middle of a line, and in a voice both harsher and huskier, called loudly, “Waiter! a brandy-and-soda.”

Dale glanced at Kerisen, who laughed, and hastened to explain that this poet was the son of a wholesale butcher; that in consequence he had shrunk from the world and cultivated bearishness, until he suddenly found himself famous, and was sought by the new school of artists who practised all the arts. These artists had been enchanted by his rudeness. To be met with a curse was a new

sensation. "Besides," said Kerisen, "the school had been accused of effeminacy, and it gave them a comfortable feeling of manliness to have among them so liberal a swearer. You must know him. Come on, and be introduced." So saying, he dragged Irvine down-stairs. Mr Bush had risen to meet his brandy-and-sodawater. He grunted and jerked his head at Dale, who returned him the slightest possible bow. He then, frowning gloomily at the waiter, from whom he took the tumbler, became absorbed in his favourite drink. His forehead was broad, prominent above the eyes, and shaded by a sort of fringe of hair. He was short, but defiantly erect. Standing still, he seemed to concentrate his efforts on the task of adding a cubit to his stature.

"Come to my place to-morrow afternoon," said Mr Rodney Bush to Kerisen, as if he were hurling him a defiance.

Kerisen replied that Dale was staying with him.

"He can come if he likes," said the poet.

Irvine was on the brink of a curt refusal, when his friend touched his arm, and accepted with gratitude.

"Morfly is coming," said Mr Bush, "and her husband, and some other folk, and a new man."

"What new man?"

"I don't know his name, damn him. He has been somewhere or done something. At least he is new."

"Reason enough," said Kerisen, with a sidelong look at his friend.

The poet stalked off, and the limpet-like youth pushed himself off from the pillar and shambled in pursuit. Dale looked after the great man's clumsy head and coarse red ears with a feeling of strange repugnance.

"Somewhat out of place as the complete artist," said Kerisen, laughing; "but he does not do the thing badly."

"Do the thing!" said Dale, bitterly. "Why must we all be doing the thing for which we are not intended? Why can't this fellow be natural?"

"And frankly be the brute which nature made him," said Kerisen, with his mock-heroic manner, and added, "Who is his new friend, I wonder? Of course he knew his name."

"Then he lied," said Dale, curtly.


"Nevertheless," said Kerisen, "you must come and see him to-morrow, and his pictures, and his china, and his books, and his last thing in friends. He writes lovely soft things about friendship."

Dale turned impatiently away.

CHAPTER XV.

"IN XANADU."

THE house of Mr Rodney Bush stands in a dull street in a mean and dingy part of the town, and seems to the uninitiated no less dreary than its neighbours. Irvine, following his friend down the dark narrow passage which leads from the front door, was surprised to find no sign of the strange individuality of the owner. Mr Bush delights in contrasts. At the end of the obscure passage Kerisen pushed open a door, lifted a heavy curtain of dull orange velvet, and ushered his friend into a large and well-proportioned room. All the colours of a faded rainbow were combined for its adornment. Pieces of stuff too big for the wall, and pieces too small to cover a chair; Venetian tapestries, brasses, glasses, old velvet cloaks, plumed hats, strange weapons, and china plates, were thick



upon the walls. There were books on shelves, and books upon the floor; old chests and deep lounging-chairs, writing-tables, divans, couches, rugs, mats, skins, the boots and spurs of a cavalier, and drinking-vessels from every spot on earth. Many easels stood about the room—some empty, some holding divers pictures and sketches of a woman represented in various attitudes.

"Why, it's always the same face," said Dale to Kerisen.

"Hush!" whispered the other; "it's Mrs Morfly; you will see her presently. Morfly worships Bush, and Bush worships Mrs Morfly."

The poet having greeted his friends with the usual abruptness, flung himself down before one of his own paintings, and awaited his other guests. Blossett and Jones came first; the former in a flutter of excitement at being admitted to this palace of art—the latter veiling his unusual emotion under an air of exaggerated weariness. Blossett began at once to expatiate on the wonders of the place, while Mr Bush acknowledged his politeness by a nod, and Jones sank down among the cushions and abandoned himself to a dream. There was a slight show of excitement when Mr and Mrs Morfly entered. It is a rule of the house that

nobody should be announced. Thus it happened that Dale, looking up suddenly from a reverie, in which he fancied himself in a society of opium-eaters, saw in the midst of the party a tall, slight woman, with a long nose and great sleepy eyes, behind whom stood a man whose most remarkable feature was a receding chin. Mr Bush did not rise from his place, but only turned his eyes from the picture to the fair original. Jones imitated the behaviour of his host, but Blossett and Kerisen rose and bowed, and the latter said, briefly, "My friend, Irvine Dale." The lady turned on Irvine her great musing eyes, while her little husband came out and took him by the hand with an eager expression of countenance. He had the air of always expecting something strange.

"Will you sing?" asked Mr Bush, who had risen and fetched a guitar.

"No," said the lady, in a soft, sad voice. "You must read to me."

The great man did not venture to dispute her commands. He seemed to study the light; then pushed a long low couch into the chosen position, flung a strangely-coloured stuff across it, and looked at the lady. She placed herself carefully upon it, while the pensive, almost melancholy expression

never left her face. Then the poet motioned Mr Morfly, with a curt gesture, to a neighbouring seat, dropped on the ground, and began to read. Sometimes he raised his eyes and gazed on the lady, while he continued to taste the words, which he uttered in his smooth recitation monotone. To a hearer unacquainted with the work, there seemed little else than the drawling utterance of broad vowel-sounds and the frequent lisping of labials. It was very soothing. Kerisen fell asleep, and was only awakened by a sudden exclamation of Irvine Dale.

"What is it?" asked Mr Bush, in a sharp, harsh voice, while Mrs Morfly shivered, and Jones copied her pained expression. Irvine was staring at the door, in which stood Mr Sebastian Archer, and behind him Ned Harefel.

"Oh, it's you?" said Mr Bush, scowling at the new-comers.

Sebastian was incapable of embarrassment. He treated men as he treated his new London clothes, with delightful familiarity, and wore his manners like his light frock-coat, with a fascinating negligence. He presented his companion, and apologised so gracefully for bringing him, that Mr Bush was obliged to mutter something about pleasure. Then,

having made his bow to Mrs Morfly, he came to Dale, and laid his hand upon his shoulder in a manner half friendly, half paternal. "My dear boy," he said, confidentially, "I looked for nothing half so pleasant."

The mind of Mr Dale at this moment was preternaturally active. He was recalling the past, dreading the future, embarrassed by the present. He was wondering what Mr Archer was thinking; what he expected him to say; what he should say. He felt impatiently that nothing mattered much, and blurted out the question, "Where is Miss Archer?" He was surprised and somewhat shocked at his sense of relief when he heard that she was in Florence.

"She is getting on wonderfully with her music," said Sebastian, willing to set the young man at his ease. "They prophesy a furor at the opera."

"Indeed," said Irvine, absently. His thoughts were now busy with other matters. He was staring at Ned Harefel, and wondering when he had last seen Katherine. Ned looked back at him with a rueful expression, sorry to find his cousin among these strange folk, whom he condemned at first sight. The harmony of the party was lost. Half the people were standing. Even Jones had risen

from his sofa. The cousins were staring awkwardly at each other. Mrs Morfly had closed her eyes, and seemed to feel the discord to her very finger-tips; while her husband peered with magpie cunning at Sebastian, as if he suspected him of concealing some delightful secret. Mr Archer had begun a conversation with Kerisen, who alone enjoyed the situation, and was delighted by his new acquaintance. Meanwhile Mr Bush regarded all his guests as if they were in a conspiracy to irritate him. It was too much for Dale, who abruptly bade his host farewell; asked Sebastian to visit him; begged Harefel, in a whisper, to come away; and with a bow to the lady, who half opened her eyes in acknowledgment, departed. Harefel, with a brief explanation to Mr Bush, who made no effort to detain him, followed his cousin, and found him in the street.

"I shan't go there again," said Irvine curtly, as he took the other's arm.

"Then you are not regularly in with that lot?" asked Ned, much relieved.

"In with them!" cried his impulsive cousin. "Look there," and he pulled him up sharply at the corner of a court, which seemed to slink away from the dingy street. It was little more than the

backyard of the gin-palace which was flaunting at the entrance. The afternoon was warm, and the dwellers had crept out of their houses to sun themselves; but the slanting sun-light, like rouge on a withered cheek, made the place more hideous. Young children, who did not know how to play, swarmed on the dirty door-steps, or crawled upon the rickety stairs within. Men, who looked both savage and stolid, leaned against the wall and smoked. There was no room for the women in the sun. Some of these seemed too tired to speak; others shrieked to each other across the court. There was a girl, too—little more than a child—who had been drinking early. She was laughing, and screaming foul jokes at the top of her voice; but nobody paid her any attention.

“Let us advise these people to live for new sensations,” said Irvine, with a bitter laugh. “Good God!” cried he, again, “just think of this place a few feet from Mr Rodney Bush’s palace of art! When I see such things I feel as if I were not fit to live.”

“Dear old fellow,” said Ned gently, and putting his arm through his cousin’s; “you are not responsible for the state of the world.”

“Yes I am—I mean, we all are,” said Irvine,



who was somewhat taken aback by the unusual profundity of his cousin's remark.

They walked on in silence towards a more fashionable part of the town, until the exercise and pleasant evening air began to soothe the unquiet mood of Mr Irvine Dale. He carried with him a question, which he longed to ask. He told himself that it was but the speaking of a few words, and fancied them spoken.

Meanwhile he said nothing, and the two friends strode on together, silent as only two Englishmen can be. But Irvine could not march into his uncle's house without an explanation. A cold shiver ran through him as he remembered that she might be there.

"When is it to be?" he asked, abruptly, with an excessive assumption of indifference.

"What?"

"The wedding, of course."

"What wedding?" Harefel stopped in the street, and stared at his cousin, "Irvie," he cried, "you don't mean to say that you believed that story about Katharine?"

"It is not true?"

"Did you think that she would look at a fellow like that?"

"It is not true," repeated Irvine to himself. Presently he asked carelessly if Lady Harefel could take him in.

"Of course she can," said Ned. "I dine at home, and I will stay with you this evening. I don't care about Lady Raddley's dance."

"My dear boy, I will go with you. She is sure to have sent me a card."

Edward Harefel looked at his cousin with some surprise. There came to him an uncomfortable suspicion, which he had sometimes felt in old days, but had always dismissed as impossible. He now banished it again, being of a hopeful disposition, and apt to regard as impossible that which was only unpleasant.

PART IV.

CHAPTER XVI.

"IN MAZES OF HEAT AND SOUND."

LADY RADDLEY'S dance was going beautifully. Everybody said so; and everybody was there. Lady Raddley repeated again and again to her smartest friends that she had been obliged to ask everybody, because people had been so disagreeable about her little dances. Her heart was full of pride and gratitude. There was a thirsty crowd about the supper-tables—a thirsty crowd battling for tea or lemonade; a block on the staircase; a crush in the doorway; and the ball-room was so full, that dancing was almost impossible. Those who had seats were afraid to move; those who had not, were drooping. It was a very hot night.

Irvine Dale came late, in a state of mingled shyness and excitement. He was not accustomed to

London society, and felt, as he was apt to feel, that everybody was observing him. Had he been the Grand Turk himself, he would have excited but little attention that evening. People of fashion are not easily moved to excitement. They long for it, but it is ever harder to obtain. Yesterday's amusement is the bore of to-day. What is there for to-morrow? That is the question. It must be something new, and a little stronger. They do not conceal their eagerness. The languid manner is disappearing among the younger folk, and an almost brutal frankness prevails. Invent us a game or tell us a story, or go and hang yourself. It is thus that the tall young men of fashion address each other, and they treat their lady friends with almost equal sincerity. Never was your wag in greater request. People must be amused. Their eagerness is terrible. They do everything with feverish energy, and yet have nothing to do. They devour news which they don't believe, and will take any pains to gain the latest possible intelligence about matters in which they feel no interest whatever. Yet they have no time for business. Mothers who will not trouble themselves to arrange suitable alliances for their own daughters, shrug their shoulders at their neighbours' marriages.

Young married women in search of stronger excitements leap at free flirtation, and leave their children for an emotion. Men who have grown weary of monotonous gambling, carry an extra card to pass the time. So they keep moving, crowding and jostling in spite of the extreme heat of the weather. So they have flooded Lady Raddley's house, and filled her shrunken heart with momentary content. It was something that all the best people came to her.

The best people, like everybody else, were hoping that something would turn up. Even Miss Katharine Adare was not wholly free from the prevailing epidemic. Her happy nature was affected by the restlessness about her. She was a little tired of crowd and heat, and she thought that she was tired of admiration. It is certain that she was dissatisfied with the manner in which the admiration was expressed. Lord Humphrey's compliments had been little short of insults; but luckily, she was rid of them now. Her partners assumed for the most part an easy air of friendliness. "They speak to me as if I were a man," said the young lady, who was very woman. "Come and have a dance," said Tommy; and, "You are in looks to-night," said Bobby: and Miss Katharine resented the speeches.

She had a habit of drawing away her head, which kept the boldest young men at a distance. She had old-fashioned ideas of respectful demeanour. She had pictured a world of men who took pains to be agreeable to women—who were privileged to be attentive, and were rewarded by a smile for accomplishments and wit. She found Bobby talking over her head to Tommy; and Tommy treating her like a good fellow. They liked her because there was no nonsense about her; but she was not sure that they would not be the better for a little more nonsense in the form of graceful manners. She had read and loved in the school-room the romances of Walter Scott. She was said to be the handsomest girl in London; and yet nobody begged the favour of dance. On the contrary, the popular young men had the air of conferring a benefit. They flung the handkerchief. They were few in number, and were valued accordingly. Moreover, Miss Katharine had a strong love of helping and protecting weaker creatures; and in the gay world she found herself patronised, and in some sort protected, by beings weaker than herself. She remembered nothing more vexatious than the fact that Irvine Dale, whom she had been so glad to help and soothe when they were boy and girl, had slipped away

from her protecting care, and fallen headlong in love with an artful minx, who of course was not nice. Not even the fair Katharine — beautiful, young, high-spirited, and gay, and in the rush of her first season—was always happy. As she sat fanning herself in a corner of Lady Raddley's cool balcony, she pictured a *salon* where there was no crowd, and much wit and wisdom—where lovely woman at once stimulated and moderated talk, and brilliant man was full of tact and devotion. From this her fancy wandered to more congenial haunts. She saw the country in all its summer beauty, the soft downs and wooded valleys around her home; and she thought of a nobler life, of the helpful woman who makes man strong for effort, and consoles him when he fails. Having reached this point in her meditations, Miss Katharine suddenly remembered Captain Loyd, who was standing patiently beside her, and very improperly burst out laughing.

"What is the joke?" asked the Captain.

"Don't you think that Society is rather vulgar?" asked she, in turn.

"Vulgar! I don't know. Of course old Raddley is vulgar; but she is not Society—at least, not all of it."

"Very true," said the lady; "but is it not vulgar to have bad manners?"

Captain Loyd was much pleased that she asked his opinion. He was a determined fellow, and had made up his mind that evening to a great effort. He wished to give a sensible answer to her last question, and he thought over it so long that she had forgotten him again, when he said, "You see, it does not do to be too polite. Shopmen and those sort of fellows have grown so infernally civil."

"That you have to be rude for the sake of distinction."

"I did not mean to be rude," said he, with less than his usual deliberation. He straightened himself as he spoke, and squared his shoulders with his old movement of resolution. It was like the moment before the school-scutting, and he seemed to hear the voice of the starter crying, "Are you ready?"

"I never could mean to be rude to you," he said.

There was something in his voice which sent a pang of terror and a thrill of ecstasy through the young lady. She hoped that he was not going to propose, for she must refuse him, and she liked him so much; and yet she would be disappointed if something were not going to happen.

"How funny the lights look across the Park!" she said, in a great hurry.

"Do they?" said he; and then, after a pause, "Miss Adare, I find it very hard to talk."

"Oh, I don't care about talking. It's quite as nice looking at the moon, I think. But on the whole—— Will you take me back to mamma?"

She prepared to rise, but he stopped her with a gesture, which was almost commanding. "Just listen to me a minute," he said. The masterful element in the big young man asserted itself. "Katharine," he continued, "you must know—I know you know. Look here, will you marry me?"

There was a new tremor in the voice, but he stood up like a man prepared for either fortune. Katharine had always liked him; and there now came over her a sudden and powerful feeling of respect. She repented keenly of having despised him, and doubted if she had not encouraged him. Perhaps she owed him something. For a moment there came to her a strong impulse to trust herself to this great, true, tender man. Her present life seemed so aimless and frivolous, and here was something to lean on. She looked up at him, but his face was dark in the shadow. Suddenly from the open window behind him stepped Irvine Dale.

"No," she said, hastily. "I am very very sorry ; but it can never be."

"Thanks," said Loyd, feeling that she meant to be kind, and standing up bravely under the blow. But when he turned away, Irvine saw the sorrow in his frank, open face. "How are you?" muttered Loyd, with a mechanical nod. Irvine shook his hand, and looked at Miss Katharine with curious disfavour. He could not bear to see her inflict pain. He certainly did not wish her to marry this stolid young Guardsman ; and yet that antagonism to the other sex which he sometimes felt, was strong in him for the moment. He thought that woman was incomprehensible, and he was impatient of puzzles. He had come for the purpose of being agreeable to a beautiful young lady ; but when Loyd had passed him and re-entered the room, he looked at her, who was more beautiful than ever, with a somewhat cross expression. Miss Adare, for her part, aggrieved at being obliged to pain a friend, was inclined to compensate herself by making another friend suffer. She assumed a calm and gentle appearance, and contemplated the Park.

"I am afraid I came at the wrong moment," said he.

"Not at all," said she. "You are absolutely refreshing; quite a novelty in society."

"So you are bored already? And yet you have woman's dearest amusement."

Irvine intended to throw a world of meaning into his last sentence; but Katharine clearly misunderstood him, for she briefly observed, "Dancing."

Irvine was at once repelled and powerfully attracted by the young lady. "Are you really tired of the season?" he asked.

"Do say something original. Everybody begins to talk about being tired of the season, and to ask where everybody else is going, and nobody cares about the answer."

"Not even Loyd," said Irvine, bitterly.

Miss Katharine raised her eyebrows, and then laughed lightly. She would not for the world have allowed Irvine to suspect how tender her heart was at the moment. "What are you doing with yourself now?" she asked, carelessly, playing with her fan.

"And nobody cares about the answer," he remarked.

She looked at him with a most mischievous air. "Perhaps you are doing nothing," she suggested.

"You are right," said he, with a short laugh; "but at least I am not playing——"

Here he stopped in some trepidation; and she said "Yes?" in a tone of voice which suggested danger.

"It's no business of mine," said he.

"Irvine," she said, with a delightful assumption of gravity, "I think that you give yourself too much to solitude. You should go out more into society, and learn to make yourself agreeable."

"Perhaps you will teach me."

"Certainly. I shall begin by telling Ned where you ought to go; but" (she had kept her keenest shaft for him) "London must be very dull after Italy."

Irvine flushed hotly. It was peculiarly distasteful to him to hear an allusion to Italy from her lips. He shifted himself about in an impatient manner.

"Do sit down," said the young lady, blandly. "It's fatiguing to see you jumping about; and it's too hot to dance."

He sat down, and wondered why he did not go away. Nevertheless he remained, answered questions, and gave a lame explanation of his disappearance since the end of term. Miss Adare was

unlike herself. Her tongue was flippant, but her heart was full of sorrow for the brave youth who had gone, and troubled by the sudden appearance of his eccentric successor.

"Who is the new swain?" whispered Mrs Midel-mass Duff, as she twirled her long gown after her on to the balcony, and allowed her large dark-rimmed eyes to rest for a moment on Mr Dale.

"I can tell you," said little Tom Peepin, eagerly, at her ear; and his information was rewarded by that silvery laugh which was the lady's greatest charm.

Irvine, who fancied that he caught the word "prig," glared at the amiable Mr Peepin in a bloodthirsty manner. He walked home that evening feverish but interested. Life was an exciting matter, though somewhat stuffy, and moving on to waltz-tunes.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE TERRACE.

PEOPLE were more or less interested by the fact that the beautiful Miss Adare had a new admirer. Captain Loyd disappeared, and his friend Tom Peepin imparted the reason to everybody in the strictest confidence.

"What can the girl be waiting for?" asked the Duchess of Ruffborough; "surely not for this jerky young man?"

"Jerky!" cried Mr Hubert Hanley Smart Hanley—"that is good, my dear duchess—that is very good." He had a great appreciation of the duchess's jokes.

"They say that he is enormously rich," murmured old Lady Dunduff, with a sigh, and a pathetic glance at her Amelia, whose shoulders were really not bad.

"He has sobthick," said Leonard Grunenhäusen, with the strongest wink which Society allows. "Sobthick; a pagatelle."

"Confound the fellow! Who cares what he has?" said the Honourable Cadby Dare. And, in truth, Society did not care much about the matter. The interest felt by Irvine's relations was naturally keener. Morning after morning, Miss Susan Harefel slipped out, and just stepped round the corner to have a talk with her dear Mrs Adare, her Adeline, who understood her so well. She went down the street in a modest and deprecating manner, seeming to apologise to the crossing-sweeper for being out without her maid, and to explain by a glance to the policeman that a gentlewoman is everywhere safe from persecution. She glided into Adeline's bower, dropped a light kiss upon her cheek, patted and smoothed her cushions with long taper fingers, arranged the light shawl about her feet, and asked tenderly about her health. Mrs Adare had always a smile for a visitor, especially in the morning, when Miss Katharine was apt to be engaged in a conscientious effort to improve her mind. She laid aside her 'Morning Post,' and resigned herself to the care of her friend. The conversation began with a few scraps of news,

a marriage, an illness, an elopement, a pending divorce, rumours and their contradictions. Thence every morning it glided to Katharine and Irvie. Every morning there were the same observations, the same arguments, the same conclusions, almost the same words; and yet these ladies enjoyed them none the less. Again and again had Mrs Adare confided to Miss Harefel that her daughter was exactly like her poor dear father. "Frankness itself," she would say, softly, shaking her head; "but if she won't talk about a thing, you might as well try to move Mahomet."

To such sentences as this Miss Susan would return a smile full of intelligence, although she never clearly understood her Adeline's favourite allusion to the prophet. She carried on the greater part of the conversation, explaining many times the interesting character of her nephew, and eloquent on the ideal marriage, the completion of two imperfect lives. Always with the same delicacy she approached the particular wedding for which she longed. Sometimes Mrs Adare, in her absent mood, murmured the reasons for and against. She never failed to say, "Katharine has the sweetest temper, but on certain subjects she flies out at a word. I tried to ask her about her feeling for you

know who, and she quite took my head off." At this both ladies laughed little laughs; and so the talks went on. They never ended before Miss Susan had glided from discussion of the younger folk to reminiscences of her own life, and explanations of her own intricate and interesting character. "Irvine is so like me," she would say; or, "I can understand his feelings, for I have felt the same. You remember, Adeline, that I told you of——" and here followed the name of some former admirer, and the story of his luckless love. She dearly loved to be the subject of conversation. She gently insinuated herself, and found in her Adeline the blindest of listeners. She would even confess many faults, which she did not possess, if only they would excite interest for herself. Most gentle of egotists, she would have dearly loved to sacrifice herself for anybody, if only she could daily pour the tale of her sacrifice into some sympathising bosom. One day the gentle current of these ladies' talk was disturbed by a keener interest. It was the day of a water-party, which included many of the best people, and among them Miss Katharine Adare and Mr Irvine Dale. "Will anything come of it?" asked Miss Susan, with clasped hands.

"There seems a providence about picnics," murmured her friend Adeline, absently. "But," she added, after a pause, "Katharine says nothing; and the party was made for poor Lady Dunduff's youngest girl."

"Is it all right?" asked old Mrs Turtle, at the station, in a voice which she believed to be low.

"Not yet," sighed Lady Dunduff, with her indomitable smile.

"A plucky old woman," said Cadby Dare, in the smoking-carriage. "Two to one she does it to-day."

The bet was booked within a yard of the little head of Miss Amelia, who was innocently smiling in the next compartment.

Miss Adare was bent on enjoyment. She looked best by daylight, and her spirits rose in the sun. Running water always makes her light of heart. She threw aside certain troublesome thoughts, which had oppressed her for the last few weeks, and trailed her fingers in the stream. What right had Irvine Dale to trouble her? His romance was over, or its scene was far away. He might go to Italy for her. It was horrid to think of marriage. It was all very well for a poor little thing like Amelia to wish to be married. She was very kind

to the harassed Lady Dunduff, and inclined to order the young brewer to fall before the nymph's pursuing feet. It was not her fault that Mr Hoplin blundered after herself. She did not want him. She was tired of admiration. She hated men. As to Irvine, he was no better than a gloomy flirt, and well deserved punishment. So, trailing her rosy fingers in the dimpled stream, she smiled on Cadby Dare, and asked, "Do you know Amalfi?" Her voice is clear; and Mr Dale, who is lying in the bows of the boat, can hear it well.

"Ran second for the Brookham Plate in '56," answered glibly the Honourable Cadby, who handled the stroke oar. He was rewarded for his information by the sweetest smile.

Irvine moved uneasily. He cannot understand why she likes to torment him. Is she a heartless flirt? Again and again she has irritated him, until he determined to go away, and then has brought him back by a glance. A few weeks have gone since he saw Loyd's face on Lady Raddley's balcony. Who will come next and see his sad expression as he turns away? Does she want a new victim? Or is she honest and gentle as she was in the old days, and only fond of fun, as a young girl should be? So passes the summer day. In the

evening they dined in an old house which stands high above the river; and after dinner they wandered out on to the broad terrace, which lay half in shadow, half in white moonlight. Katharine, who had been very gracious to Irvine in the house, began to laugh as soon as she perceived the poetic beauty of the evening outside. Her companion drew a deep breath, as a man on the borders of an enchanted land.

"What a perfect night!" he whispered, awe-struck.

"Do look at Mr Peepin," says Katharine, eagerly; "the little wretch is almost smothered under the duchess's wraps;" and then she mimics her Grace of Ruffborough in a most improper manner. Irvine is silent; but Miss Braunenbaum, the heiress, passing on the arm of Lord Humphrey Durfey, gives a smothered laugh, and the mimic stamps her foot with annoyance.

"Lord Humphrey is likely to console himself with a fortune," says Leonard Grunenhausen to the charming Mrs Midelmass Duff, who observes, shortly, that Humphrey is no fool, and returns to her task of extracting a diamond star from the wealthiest but most close-fisted of her admirers. She has heard, as she tells him softly in the moon-

light, that his uncle in Amsterdam is such a wonderful judge of diamonds, and diamonds are her passion. "Ah, if I were not so poor!" she sighs, and raises her innocent eyes to the dusky youth beside her.

Katharine was seated in a shady corner of the high terrace, looking down across the sloping to the weird river far below; and, in defiance of the influence of time and place, was chattering about Lady Dunduff and the tardy Mr Hoplin, about the vaunted charms of Lady Lilian Reeve and the ostentation of the duchess her mother, about Miss Braunenbaum's income, about picnics and flirtations, saying many foolish things about all follies.

"I wish you would not go on like this," said Irvine, crossly.

She stopped at once, and looked at him from under arched eyebrows.

"If you hate all these people," he added, "you ought not to go about with them."

"I am to be condemned to solitude because other people are foolish?" and she laughed.

"I can't understand you," cried Irvine, hotly. "You must know that I don't care for all this tattle."

"I am sorry I am so silly," said she, with assumed meekness.

"Katharine," he said, "I can't stand it. One day you seem to like me, and the next you mock me. You keep me in a fever. You play with me."

She stood up and looked at him calmly.

"I must know," he went on, rashly. "You must tell me——"

"Must!" She breathed the word so softly that he did not hear it.

"Katharine, will you marry me?" he cried, bending eagerly forward, and trying to read her face.

She looked at him with real surprise.

"Will you marry me?" he asked, impatiently, and stretched a trembling hand towards her.

She was highly offended at his speaking at that time. The man was preposterously fickle. It was an insult to her sex.

"Do you fancy yourself at Amalfi?" she asked, bitterly.

"What?" asked he, sharply.

"Perhaps you mistake me for Miss Archer."

"Miss Archer! You don't believe—— But no. You want an excuse for not answering."

"I want no excuse. I answer that it is impossible."

Irvine looked at her with surprise and alarm.

Presently he said, in a changed tone, "You are very cruel. You know that you have given me hope. Now you throw me off, and pretend to believe——"

"Pretend!"

"Who told you this precious story about Amalfi?" As he asked the question his thoughts flew to his cousin Ned. Miss Adare turned towards the house. She wondered if any woman was ever so scolded before by a man whom she had just refused. She was strong as the champion of women; but she felt an awful tendency to tears. She dared not stay.

"Don't let me drive you away," he said, in a low voice; "I know the right thing to do," and he strode away into the shadows. He was full of bitterness. He said to himself that she had lured him to town by making her own mother believe that she liked him; that she had deliberately determined to add him to the list of the victims of her vanity. "Now to join Loyd," he said aloud, and at the same moment nearly ran against a man who was standing alone in the shadow of the shrubbery.

"Irvine, you look ill. What is the matter?" asked Ned, anxiously.

"Ask Miss Adare," cried Irvine, and then paused,

and added, more slowly, "And ask her why she taunted me with some false story about Amalfi."

"About Amalfi?"

"I suppose you never spoke of the place to her," and Irvine laughed a most unpleasant laugh.

"Irvine, what do you mean? Irvine, you don't suspect me of trying to injure you? Why should I harm you?"

"Because you love her."

Harefel gave a low cry, and stepped back. Before he could speak, his cousin had disappeared among the deepening shadows, walking fast, and muttering as he walked.

Ned Harefel went towards Miss Adare, stopped, turned away, and walked resolutely into the house. He felt, rather than saw, that the proud Katharine was crying.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CHURCH.

OXFORD is not always a cheerful place in late September. To Irvine Dale, who was alone in lodgings, the town seemed as dreary as himself. He derived a melancholy pleasure from the consciousness of its sympathetic dismalness. He drew the pall about him, as it were, and was still. The colleges were empty of all but an occasional echo. The crumbling grey stone, which by green gardens and in the summer sun is beautiful, seemed cold and dead beneath a sky of its own colour. Even the river, for all its fulness, had a leaden and a sluggish air. The roads, which pass out of the town flat and featureless between mean buildings, were made doubly stagnant by paddled mud and muddy puddle. Farther afield the land was heavy and damp, and the paths which climb the sloping

hills were tracks of slime. It was a wet season, dull, steamy, and listless. The very rain was slow and sullen, soaking a man before he knew that it was raining, and dying out slowly as if for weariness.

With such weather about him, Irvine having renounced his kind, betook himself doggedly to his books. He read, because he dared not think. He was glad to be alone, but was conscious of no other pleasure or hope in life. He nursed his torpor, fearing that some pain might follow; and yet he hardly cared if it did. So he lived through the hours, clinging numbly to a dull routine. Any treadmill was better than the maddening thought of himself, of the woman whom he loved, of the friend whom he had thrust aside. The one good was oblivion. Some remnant of a prejudice, at which he smiled, kept him from opium; perhaps, too, the disinclination to face the shopman. The slavey who brought him food embarrassed him, and made him hide his face behind the book which he pretended to read. The country and the town were sodden; and so was he. Through dark days and lengthening nights he lived a vegetable life, very like a cabbage, save for the dim consciousness that he was such, and the faint hope that such he might

remain. But it was not to be. One day his repose was interrupted by an unwelcome visitor. There was a mincing step in the passage, a sharp tap at the door, and the free-thinking Blogg entered. He had passed the whole vacation at Oxford, and at the first rumour of an acquaintance, he tripped forth to boast of his solitude. Such is sometimes the reward of the hermit life.

"I am independent of people," he said, pluming himself on the hearth-rug. Irvine groaned. His visitor had been with him an hour, and had made the same remark three times before. "I have abandoned myself to French novels," continued the little man, fingering the hair about his temple. "Fancy me alone for three months, with all the latest refinements of vice!"

"I wonder the earth did not swallow you!" said Irvine, grimly; "or at least a sewer engulf you!"

Blogg laughed his little laugh. "A modern Abiram," he said. He had not talked for weeks, and had a great deal to say. He was in a Parisian vein, ambitious of *esprit*. He postured in body and in speech. His remarks had a false air of epigram. He darted his borrowed plumes against all things in heaven and earth, till his auditor, awakened from his lethargy, felt the pain of an intense loathing.

The instinct of a gentleman is strong, and Irvine did not say, "For God's sake, go." Only when his persistent visitor had gone, he hurriedly locked the door behind him. He looked at the window, where the rain was making dirty marks. Is Blogg all that we can produce? he asked. He thought of this hermit's course of novels, and pulled down from the shelf the 'Confessions' of De Musset. He read a page, and let the book slip from his hand. Then he laid himself down on the floor, closed his eyes, and pressed his forehead hard against the cheap tawdry carpet. He thought that if the house were falling he would not care to move. He seemed to have nothing to say, but there came with a groan the words, "O God!" So there he lay exhausted, half alive, while the rain dripped from a broken pipe, and the shadows deepened, and the dismal day sank imperceptibly into the more dismal night. To know everything is to know that everything is vanity. To cultivate the taste is to grow weary of beauty. To love is a folly, if not a foulness. To live is weariness, if not agony. But yet it is something to close tired eyes, and to press heavy head against the irritating carpet. So Irvine Dale lay crushed against that dingy floor, and the shadows weighed upon him.

At last he remembered that he had been indoors all day, and, obedient to habit, stumbled to his feet, pulled a soft hat over his eyes, and went out into the damp. He could not tell if it were raining or no. The air was heavy and thick with moisture. The few lights seemed to swim in vapour. There was gravel and pool in the yard, and wide watery slush in the street. Fearful of meeting Blogg, Irvine turned towards the darker part of the town. He went down a long street, wherein the lamps struggled feebly with fog and night. Here and there was a sickly glimmer before his feet, and the debauched brilliancy of the gin-palace at a corner seemed to hint horrors which the darkness would have hidden. There was no sound save of much dismal dripping, and now and then a coarse laugh or oath prompted by drink. For perfume was a pervading smell of vegetable stuff, and here and there a fiery breath of gin. It was not a pleasant street, nor was the shop before which Irvine paused its most pleasant ornament. Perhaps it was closed for the night. Certainly two shutters were up, and probably there were no more in stock. The uncovered part of the window had been roughly mended with paste and brown paper. Within, a tallow candle was guttering, and lending a flatter-

ing light to a miscellaneous collection of goods. It seemed as if the tradesman had been raking the gutters by night, and had tumbled out the contents of his sack for the delight of the passer. Broken crockery and greasy rags, a twisted toasting-fork, a battered kettle, remnants of her Majesty's uniforms, books without covers, a doubtful print with a French verse beneath it, a leering beauty of some cheap Sir Peter Lely, a pair of snuffers, and a rusty pistol. It was the pistol on which Irvine's eyes were fixed. As he leaned forward against the creaking shutter, he was wondering if the weapon could still be used. He felt in his pocket for money. At that moment two women brushed by his elbow so closely, that the coin slipped from his fingers. He turned and looked after them. They were drifting hurriedly down the street, holding tight about them those shawls which seem to have been made for children but are always worn by women. Anything was enough to change the young man's purpose. He let the coin lie idle, and followed the lean, hurrying figures of the women "We shall be late," said one, speaking from a throat which seemed to have been always choked with fog. The other muttered something, and the first speaker said, "It'll be bright and 'ot, no fear."

When they turned the next corner, Irvine found that many women and some men were hastening in the same direction. He passed a policeman shining with wet, a benign but contemptuous officer, who glanced sharply at him. He turned another corner, and found himself borne forward by the crowd through the wide open doors of a church. In a moment the crowd had gone from chill to warmth from gloom to brightness; from the oppression of heavy air and narrow streets to space and light. For low blotched ceilings, the vivid spring of arches; for mean wall-paper, rich colour of altar-cloth and reredos; for loneliness, fellowship—the glow about them and above them, shadows in which the roof was forgotten. Ears weary of harsh voices and the drizzle of dirty water, were on sudden filled by a great wave of music. Men, women, and children were singing earnestly, almost fiercely, as gladly as toil-worn creatures can, a hymn which was almost a battle-song. Irvine opened his mouth to sing, but shut it again, and shrank behind a pillar. These people seemed to sing from one soul, and his voice was an intrusion. Was it merely warmth of body and pleasure of eye which found expression in these voices? he wondered. It was well to be thankful for warmth and brightness, which are no

small matters to colourless lives. Religion seemed lovely, friendly, and helpful, and the house of God was the home of the poor. Irvine had often pushed the heavy leather and passed into the perpetual fragrance of incense. Now there came back to him a clear picture of a great cathedral, whose doors are always open to the weary and sad, to the gay and thankful; a mighty mansion, sublime and restful, intimate and aspiring, where a girl sets down her basket of fruit and a man the burden of his sins.

"Another," cried a young priest, intensely English, for all his curious vestments. "Another, and sing it with all your hearts."

"Who is he?" whispered Irvine to a woman who stood beside him.

"Who's he? Why, that's Mr Romney hisself," said she, sniffing contempt of the young man's ignorance.

"You look at him," said a man given to talk, and he emphasised his command by pushing the stranger in the back. "He ain't more than out of bed from the fever, he ain't. He don't spare himself, he don't. You talk about pluck. I know what pluck is. I was in the 10th myself. I remember——"

Here the new hymn began, and the personal anecdotes of the ex-soldier were lost in a great roar of sound.

Irvine Dale looked at Mr Romney with keen interest. He had often heard of him and his intolerant speeches. He had heard many little jokes cracked at his expense. But the actual man was something more than embodied intolerance. There were signs of power; and to Irvine in his weakness, power and self-confidence were the most wonderful things in the world. Here is a man who works hard, and is certain that he does good. He goes about helping the weaker brethren—a true servant of the Church—a servant who is glad to serve. The Church and all her doctrines are too good for presumptuous criticism. She was good enough for many men far greater and wiser than he. He laughs at the notion that she is not good enough for him. He refers his occasional doubts to his own weakness or the promptings of evil. He does not think much about himself, for he has little time for other thoughts than those about Mrs Tadger's drunken husband, or old Snarley's chronic lumbago. He labours to cure the vice and to soothe the temper. He is ready to die at his post, or, living to old age, to fight manfully and cheer-

fully all day, and every day, against the powers of darkness. To the profoundly philosophic person, who fulfils the duty of his life by asking a great many times why the powers of darkness are, he would answer, as to an idle question, that they were there to be fought against, and so turn away to his full and vigorous life. Simple and steadfast, he can obey and he can command. He does as he is bidden by those set in authority over him, and takes as a matter of course the prompt obedience of those under his control. A true man and a happy, thinks Irvine, with keen envy, and he feels an unwonted stir at his heart. Then his thoughts turned to himself, as they often did. Why was he so pitifully weak? Why could not he lay down his bundle of stale doubts and incoherent speculations, and set himself to honest and helpful work? In this moment of quickened life he thought that he could do it. What if he enlisted on the impulse? How would it be afterwards? After all, it was no hard matter to put away his doubts; and how great a relief! Was he so wise that he must despise the Church; and so strong that he could work without support, advice, command? To help each other, and together to help the poor—this is brotherhood, this is the business of the Church,

this is Christianity. Irvine's hand clenched itself. If he put it to the plough, would he turn back? He felt a new warmth. The organ pealed forth a mighty sound, and weak, worn voices, rising together, were as the shout of an army. He launched himself on the feeling of the crowd, and was free of his desolation for a time. Without, the night was growing wilder. In the pauses of the hymn a wailing wind was heard, and once a gust of hail lashed the windows. The sense of companionship grew stronger. His brothers and sisters were close around him in a haven of refuge. All the fiends of hell might ride upon the storm, but he and his comrades would defy them. High rose the music, and the voice of Irvine Dale went out to swell the chorus, defiant and exulting. Such moments are fleeting. Other thoughts came creeping back, and he remembered how the philosophic Blogg had said that Christianity was a force which must not be ignored. He stiffened his arm with a foolish wish that he might rap that free-thinking head against the pillar. He clung to his new hope of useful life. He told himself fiercely that it might be, that it should be. He would fight against the reaction which he knew from experience would follow his first enthusiasm. When Irvine left the

church, the rain had passed, and after one last wild burst the wind was still. A watery moon was astray among tumbled clouds, and the wet street was white amid the shadows. Suddenly Irvine felt a quick hand on his shoulder and heard the salutation of a cheery voice. He turned and stared with astonishment at the animated countenance of Leonard Aubrey. "What on earth are you doing here?" he asked.

"I am a lay helper," said Aubrey, with intense enjoyment of the joke. The corners of his mouth went up as sharply as his eyebrows. He looked like incarnate mischief.

"A what?" asked Irvine.

"I sing in the choir, dispense tea, give counsel, scatter snuff, obey Dick Romney."

"You?"

"I. Why not? I must do something. It's capital fun."

"Fun?"

"Capital. You had better join us. It is just the thing for a serious fellow like you. You never saw such people. There's Mrs Nudge. Good evening, Mrs Nudge. Mind you go straight home."

"Lor, Mr Hawbrey, you 'ave such sperrits," said a vinous old lady with no waist.

"I wish you 'ad less," said he; and Mrs Nudge was left behind, convulsed with internal merriment. "Is not she like Lady Dunduff?" said Aubrey. "They are exactly like the old women in Society. They will make you die of laughing." He began to pour forth anecdotes of the lady who was suspected of having drunk her blankets, but who ascribed their disappearance to the eccentric appetite of her cat; of the lad who nearly starved himself to death that he might keep his mother out of the workhouse. "There is nothing in the world so beautiful as the charity of the poor," he cried, with unwonted fervour.

Before the two friends parted, Irvine promised to place himself under Romney's orders. "Tell him at once," he said, "before I change my mind;" and Aubrey laughed. It is probable that, had any sage person preached his duty to Mr Dale that evening, the perverse youth, in spite of the effect of the service, would have coldly withdrawn into himself. But the light-hearted Leonard seemed to take his help as a matter of course, and of no overwhelming importance. It seemed equally absurd to utter a solemn refusal, and to take any credit for agreeing. "Tell him at once," he said; and he felt with wonder and delight that he was pledged to something.

CHAPTER XIX.

"THE DEAREST FRIEND TO ME."

*"Je ne sais où va mon chemin,
Mais je marche mieux quand ma main
Serre la tienne."*

"Good God, Ellen! what will the boy be at next?" asked Sir Joseph, swelling with astonishment.

"I do hope he will be careful of infection," sighed his wife, comfortably; and added, after a pause, "Of course he will take orders." Then she began to consider what would be the most desirable neighbourhood for a living.

"The boy's a fool," said her husband; "but luckily he can afford it." And as Sir Joseph thought of his nephew's income, a portion of his respect returned.

Miss Susan Harefel said nothing, but she thought much. She retired to commune with

herself, and after a becoming interval, produced a letter, which Mrs Adare pronounced beautiful. It was full of allusions to Savonarola, and Irvine tore it into the smallest possible fragments. It increased his discontent. That very morning Romney had asked him to appear more regularly at church. Aubrey suggested his taking orders. "I am not good enough myself," he said. "It would simplify matters if I took orders, and a wife, and a glebe, and a cow, and a horse of all work; but I can't do it. Whereas you are just the man for the place; you are not too lively. You are lowering the spirits of all the dear old ladies on your beat."

Irvine shuddered. "I would rather do anything for them than talk to them," he said.

"Laugh at them," said the other. "Laugh, or you cry. Their tongues are the worst thing about them. It was only yesterday that Molly Maloney flung the chest of drawers at Betty Pryce; and this morning Betty gave Molly her last quid of tobacco. Is not that a blazing fact for you?"

"They make me sad, and then I make them sadder. Their lives are grim enough without me."

"They are much jollier than you," said Aubrey, with intense conviction. "Why, they are horribly contented. They don't care for cleanliness, honesty,

religion, and such wholesome things. Give them the taste. That's the thing to do."

"And tinsel, and confession, and hypocrisy," muttered Dale, under his breath.

"The Church is not good enough for you, and I am not good enough for the Church," was Aubrey's last comment; and he went off whistling.

Weeks passed, and Irvine still clung to his new occupation. He was beginning to think that he gave up things too readily; was too easily offended by inevitable imperfections; acted too often in obedience to a short-lived mood of disgust. So he continued to visit old women, to discuss the abstinence question with tempted men, and to pat the heads of wan children. Often on his rounds he thought of Miss Katharine Adare, and thought of her with singular calm. He saw her sweet girl's face in dingy places, and heard her soft clear voice breathe peace in noisy households. She would so easily brighten these fog-choked women, who were of the same species and sex as she. He remembered her in the cottages at home. She never thought that she was condescending, or being very good. She was frank, pleasant, and friendly to the poor, as to the rich. They understood her honest eyes and simple speech, her gaiety and humour.

For all her kindly wisdom she was so ignorant of evil, that it was not in her presence. Wherever she went, light and health came with her. She made life beautiful and the world young. "Lor bless yer, sir, wheriver was you a-looking? Didn't yer see the scuttle?" And Irvine woke from his dream in the dark close passage with a bruised shin. He woke to tell himself that he would think no more about the girl, over whose spirit he had cast the wavering shadow of his life. He would not cross her path again. That was the least which he could do. How he would like to see her again!

Meanwhile Miss Katharine thought more kindly of Irvine, as she pictured him at his new work. She had always liked his aspirations. Of course he was too unstable for the foundation of any girl's happiness. It was scarcely a matter for pride to have swayed his wayward character for one moon-lit hour. She was sorry for him, for old acquaintance' sake, and for the sake of his people. As for himself, he was easily consoled, as she knew well. He had been unfaithful to that Amalfi girl, for whom she was very sorry. So the beautiful Miss Katharine mounted on the pedestal of pride, and looked down with pity on everybody. She would

have liked to help Mr Dale with her advice ; but these young men are so conceited, that they will not take advice from girls. Ned Harefel, too, who had always consulted her, had gone abroad, without announcing his intention, or even saying good-bye. Why should he wander away alone, and prefer picture-galleries full of guides, and churches desecrated by Cockneys, to the most eligible country-houses? Young men are very silly and very wilful. The longer Miss Katharine lived, the more certain was she of this fact. She determined to think little about them. She had no intention of playing the hen on the edge of the duck-pond. To the young lady thinking such thoughts, the quiet of her country home was not so satisfactory as usual. She was glad to start on a round of visits, and to amuse herself with the humours of new people. It was perhaps a little dull when the men were shooting, but the evenings were sometimes gay, and she was generally able to occupy her thoughts with the passing show. Her progress was a triumph. Men eminent and men fashionable, elderly bachelors and solemn boys, were all more or less attentive. So she amused herself with no intent of harm, and escaped uninjured.

At Oxford the winter passed more slowly, but still it passed away. Finding that he had kept terms enough, and that the dons had ceased to expect that he would do much honour to the college, Irvine went in for a pass and took his degree. He pleaded the state of his district as a reason for spending Christmas in Oxford. He could not yet bear the numberless associations of home. He began the new year with a purpose of servile obedience to Dick Romney. He nursed his respect for this good man carefully and jealously. He felt that an object of veneration was necessary for his life.

"Is there no man worthy?" he had asked in his bitterness, and had feared the answer as he feared death. One Sunday morning in early summer he prepared to go to church as usual, because Romney expected his voice in the choir. He was overworked, tired and restless, but pleased to obey in spite of disinclination. "'Ere's old Dismal," said a small boy at the corner, and Dale heard him with no sense of amusement. He recognised a pupil, and wondered if his mission was to damp all youthful gaiety. Within the church was a Sunday morning congregation, far more respectable than the gatherings on week-day evenings. The folk

whose gala clothes were in pawn, showed a proper pride by remaining at home. Those with whom the world went better, were gay with cheap bits of excruciating colour. Few workmen were present, and their wives were subdued by the neighbourhood of the tradesmen's ladies, who only came on Sundays. These latter were rendered somewhat uneasy by new ideas of Christian charity, supported by a secret belief that the High Church was fashionable, but depressed by an hereditary horror of the slums. Their dress, though of better material, was no whit more beautiful than that of their poorer neighbours. With them came their substantial husbands in shiny black, willing to humour the weaker vessels, but themselves preferring a less compromising service. In her accustomed corner might be discerned some slight faded lady, inclined to pious observance — a cheese-parer, perhaps — certainly a mighty fussier over little things — something of a tyrant, descending in her guarded ladyism, but working honestly, and with a very tender heart for dirty little children. But these were few and far between. Regarded as a whole, the congregation was not impressive, nor was the church so beautiful in the broad pitiless light of day. The sun shone through the windows, and the mean was

laid bare in all its meanness. The loving work and prayer of generations had been put into the foreign cathedral which had furnished the model. The copy had been done in a hurry. The architect had made money. The contractor had made a good deal of money. The work had been scamped.

In came the procession. It was the lot of Irvine Dale that morning to walk by a greasy man of sensual aspect, swelling in his crumpled white gown, an amateur who valued himself in the choir—possessor of a loose bass voice. Irvine had a horror of this yoke-fellow. Before them walked the curate, Ambrose Hart, who went as far as he was allowed in decoration, and seemed to lie in wait for filching further concessions, slipping out his foot and peering, as one who loves to get the better of his bishop. A strip of some green stuff was about his neck. Things did not go very well that day. The first lesson was a chronicle of slaughter, and the great deeds of the warriors of Israel were read by the Rev. Ambrose Hart in a soft, careful voice, which was not his own, but the echo of a greater man. The singing was pretentious, but uncertain. Romney was overworked, and took little part in the service. Perhaps it was fatigue which prevented him from seeing that the

choir boys had invented a new game. Dale touched the small singer who sat before him, accused himself of finding a vent for his irritation, and blamed himself for his self-accusation. To what end was this perpetual thinking through and through every thought? Should he never do the smallest action without solemnly arraigning himself? Were his motives so vastly important? Thinking in this dull accustomed round, he sat and looked so dreary, that kindly women thought that he worked too hard, and one gentle sister allowed her thoughts to wander to a pattern of consoling slippers. She wondered if she might extend these female ministrations to one who was not a curate. She turned up her meek eyes, and met a scowl, which was not intended for her. The current of Irvine's thoughts was interrupted by Mr Hart's quick ascent of the pulpit-stairs. This rising ecclesiastic had long practised an eager rush into the pulpit. A neck thrust out, a whisk of robes, and there he was, and the impromptu sermon had begun. Before old ladies had rubbed their eyes, he was at them. He had just been ordained priest, and was full of enthusiasm for the priestly office. This youth, who looked younger than he was, with high, smooth forehead and carefully-arranged hair, a tonsure or

premature baldness, a costume studiously legal, a flavour of foreign churches visited with guide-book in the long vacations—this good youth, with long lean neck, vanishing chin, and bright eyes so close to the long thin nose—this blameless youth was commanding those "weary and heavy laden" to confess to him their doubts, their fears, their crimes. He would advise them, he would console them, he would absolve them, for power had been given to him as priest. There was small sign of power in his speech. "Poor little wretch!" said Irvine, under his breath, pitying a vanity more childlike than his own—"poor little wretch! He would totter under the weight of a lost lamb." Dale was haunted by a rhythm, caught he **knew** not where, beating a dull accompaniment to the poor little sermon. "Pale echo of the Church of Rome," it beat in his hot brain. A long limp curate in black stole in at one door, picked up a book, and stole out by another. It was the sort of thing they do abroad. The impromptu sermon, which had been learned by heart, ran smooth and neat, and was not long. The procession trooped out, and Irvine Dale, as he plucked off his white singing-robes, wondered if he should ever put them on again.

The next morning, as Irvine sat listless in his

room, thinking of Katharine Adare, and thinking that he would think of her no more, he heard a sharp but not loud tap at the door. "Come in," he cried, and there entered, civil but precise, in a long black garment and a very neat collar, the Rev. Ambrose Hart. Irvine stared at this unexpected visitor. As he offered him a chair, he fancied that there was the expectation of rebuff in his guest's brown eyes, but obstinacy in the long thin nose.

"You have not been among us for a whole week," said Mr Hart, "until yesterday."

"No," said Irvine ; and a pause ensued.

"I have thought it my duty," said the young ecclesiastic, with his most precise manner, "to pay you this visit."

"Thanks."

"Oh, do not thank me. I even fear that you may, for the moment, resent what I am about to say. I hope not, but——"

Irvine laughed. "I don't think," said he, "that I shall be made very fierce by anything which you can say."

"I am so glad," said the visitor, with an expression of disappointment ; "but I hope that I am prepared for misunderstanding and misinterpretation."

"What is it? You make me curious."

The Rev. Ambrose Hart fixed his short-sighted brown eyes on his auditor, and began to speak more quickly, but with no less care and smoothness. "I have observed, my dear Dale, that you are disquieted. Pardon me, but it is so. Why do you not unburden yourself? Oh, why do you not make use of those means which the Church——"

"Did Romney send you?" interrupted Dale, sharply; "I shall be glad to talk to Romney."

This interruption was painful to the young priest. A slight flush appeared about his temples. "Our dear Romney is busy, perhaps too busy—but who am I, that I should judge?—with matters purely secular. I do not ask you to talk with any one. Rather I entreat—I enjoin you to lay your burden on the Church. O my dear brother, do not neglect the supreme blessing of the confessional. We invite all, we extend our arms to all. Come to me or to some other discreet and learned minister of God's word."

Irvine stared at him in dumb amazement. The expressionless brown eyes were aglow with enthusiasm; the slender fingers of the right hand were raised in admonition.

"Discreet and learned!" stammered Irvine;
"poor little soul!"

The heart of the preacher waxed hot. "Do you reject our gifts? Do you deny the power of the Church and of—of the priesthood? O my brother, beware! Beware of pride. Be not puffed up, be not stiff-necked."

Here he paused, panting, and Dale strode to the door. "We shall gain nothing by all this," he said, quietly. He stopped interruption by a gesture, and continued. "You mean well, I know. I thank you for your good intentions, but this is impossible." He opened the door, and the Rev. Ambrose Hart walked quickly out with his head bowed in picturesque humility. Irvine flung himself into a chair, and burst out laughing. He had not laughed aloud for months. He was filled with a delightful sense of humour. For the first time he perceived the beauty of the day. Young summer, not yet grown drowsy, breathed through the open window, and set his pulses bounding. The Anglican Church seemed to crumble about him, and to leave him in the open world, like one new born into an earthly paradise. He abandoned himself once more to the impulse of the moment, and in an

hour's time was flying through the meadow-lands to London.

Not many minutes after his departure, there arrived at his lodgings a young man bronzed by foreign suns and flushed with anxiety. It had cost Ned Harefel much effort to decide on a visit to his cousin. He remembered well Irvine's last words to him on the terrace by the river. The very tone of his voice was still painfully distinct. But he had always forgiven Irvine. He was his friend, and must not be lost. He was unlike other people, and must not be judged by their standard. What would he do in this practical world, if neither Katharine nor himself looked after him? So Mr Edward Harefel, who, having once purposed, acted quickly and thoroughly, came posting from foreign parts to take his wayward cousin by the hand.

"No, sir, he is not at home. He has gone off all of a sudden, without a word to nobody. Not as I mean to complain; everything is paid and regular; and always quiet and well-conducted; but, lor, there, it has taken me aback, him going off so sudden, and everything higgledy-piggledy, and no one knowing why or wherefore, and his things not back from the wash; and it was only Saturday last as Mr Romney was saying——"

"To London, you say? Did he leave no address?"

"No, sir; that he did not," said the good lodging-house landlady, sniffing for the twentieth time; "but there, he always was unmethodistical, not one to say when or what—and we can't look for old heads on young shoulders. Yes, sir, my husband shall write as soon as we hears anything; and shall I send the washing to the same address? Yes, sir, thank you." She held Mr Harefel's card in a corner of her apron, and stood on her threshold, benignly superior to the vagaries of young men.

PART V.



CHAPTER XX.

MONDAY.

ONE of the first real summer days had come to London. The leaves were still bright and fresh from spring showers, and their green showed the more delicate for the blackness of old trunks and branches, which had known many fogs and ceaseless smoke. The turf was young and springy, the air soft and fitful. The Row was full of people tempted by the beauty of the evening. There were many maidens, fresh as the leaves, not yet wearied by close rooms and late hours; and fairest among the maidens, glad as a young huntress in the morning of the world, was Katharine Adare. Tolerant of the girls about her, pleased and amused by the young men of fashion, deeply attached to the noble animal who carried her so well, she moved as if to music, and the eyes of the crowd followed her in

wonder. Irvine Dale, on his way from the station, leaned back in the corner of his hansom, and abandoned himself to the same sweet influence of the time. His restless eyes were half closed, and he made a pleasure of breathing. Ever quick to catch the spirit of his surroundings, joyous or sad, he felt the dawning summer in his blood and brain. Formless poetry seemed to rise unbidden to his lips. He was beginning to live once more. Surely he had been dead or sleeping through the damp Oxford winter. He awoke to life and light, and warmth and comfort. Comfort demands no ecstasy nor passion. She soothes the senses, lulls the conscience, blurs past evils into a mere vague background which throws into relief the pleasures of the present. Comfort is a solid fact in a world of shadows. The London of to-day takes great pains to be comfortable. Our landscapes must be soft as our sofas, our comedies mildly agreeable as our claret. The drama must be fitted to the properties. Art and Literature are the handmaids of refined upholstery. Wood-pavement changes clangour to murmur, and the city roars as gently as a sucking-dove. Once in twenty-four hours occurs the great event. The day is adapted to the dinner. For this our senses are educated and doctored. They

must not be put out of tune by unpleasant shocks. There are grim places in this ancient city, as there are dust-bins in old palaces; but they are kept out of sight. Some such thoughts as these flitted through the mind of Irvine Dale as he was whirled down Park Lane on his way from Paddington, but disturbed him not. He was in a mood of easy philosophy, to which a spice of cynicism imparted a sharper flavour. He enjoyed the curl of his lip. His thoughts of comfort were not so deep and serious that he ceased to be comfortable. He was in the modern romantic mood. So as he passed the Park and caught a glimpse of golden hair above the dark habit, he pleased himself with the dream that it was the girl whom he held loveliest. He dressed himself at his hotel and went forth to his club. It was pleasant to be once more in a dress-coat, and to see his neat shoes gleaming on the pavement. It was pleasant to sit before his white table-cloth in the room of fair proportions which even many dinners did not make too hot; to nod to a man who, for a wonder, had not forgotten him; to feel his opera ticket in his breast-pocket. He murmured that pregnant line of Clough—

“How pleasant it is to have money, heigh-ho!”

The sigh was a comfortable sigh. He called for the best claret. Having tasted no wine for some six months, he felt it in his veins like life. His heart grew hot, his eye bright, and his extreme placidity was endangered. His was no longer the mood of one who sighs that such is life as he unpins his napkin, and to whom moonlight is the fitting complement of toothpick and cigarette. Comfort gave place to restless gaiety. He sent for a hansom, and was borne away to the opera, with his head full of half-forgotten melodies. To eyes weary of darkness and squalor, the house was a glow of splendour; to ears accustomed to snuffled Gregorians, the great sound of the overture was overwhelming as the sea. He floated away on the tidal music joyous, passionate, and young. It was the fulness of life after scant measure. The people all about him gave him a warm feeling of fellowship without intruding upon him. His delight was exalted and intensified by their share in it; and he would not disturb his joy by scanning their faces or considering their characters. If he looked, he might see many commonplace persons: his fancy filled the place with people swayed by music, as he himself was. The curtain rose. It was a lucky night, and all went well. All things

were in harmony. The scenes were beautiful, and fit for the story. The story was of the South, full of tumultuous passion, but the passion was controlled by the artist. Intense feeling everywhere, but everywhere the instinct of form. It was the work of a man who was not afraid of passion, because he knew his strength—who was not afraid of melody, because he was master of his melody. Here was no sliding down from sentiment to sentiment, no abandonment to continuous sighs, no stream running on and on to nothing in the sand. It was not the work of a musical Narcissus enraptured by his own sweetness; but of a master-mind inspiring a great dramatic poem, and appealing to men who hear and see and think.

Irvine Dale, who knew a little of most things, knew a little about music, and enjoyed it much. In his strange mood he was brought easily under the spell. He was so far carried away, that the story on the stage seemed real to him. He did not struggle with the belief that it was real. He was outside among shadows; and life, ennobled by great action, passion, and music, was lived before his eyes. In such a world nothing is strange. Irvine sat still in his place, with wide-open eyes and parted lips, as there rose sweet and clear the

sound of a well-known voice. In another moment, with the song on her lips, Marion Archer was there before his eyes. He did not hear the loud applause which greeted her, but he saw the petulant quick motion which acknowledged it. She was impatient of these formalities, which kept her from her work. In the dead silence, which is so eloquent of pleasure, her voice rose again. She sang like a milk-maid fresh and sweet in a meadow of cowslips, like an artist brave and confident in her art. Irvine felt a great unreasonable pride. "She has gained her end," he whispered to himself—"she has won her victory."

"Who is she?" he asked his neighbour, and smiled as he asked.

"Manetti," answered the musical amateur, glancing up from his score in mild surprise. Irvine's head swam. Was it madness, or had her eyes found his? Was she singing to him, as in the old days at Amalfi? It must be so. The clear unfathomable eyes were fixed on him. He could not move; he scarcely dared to breathe; it seemed that her voice would fail if he looked away. He felt that the whole crowd saw that she was singing to him, and to him only. Nothing could be hidden in the wide pitiless light. The curtain fell, and he

sank back exhausted. He was weak and feverish. He made an effort to recall himself to the realities about him, and looked round the house. There was a great gathering of the usual people. The most exalted ladies were the most quiet in dress. Young men but little skilled in the fine art of lounging, stood stiffly in the entrances. Stout gentlemen who had been hurried from their dinner-tables, dozed in their stalls. Their womenkind studied their books with furtive earnestness. There was much half-apologetic use of opera-glasses. Critically examined, the audience were not exciting. But Irvine was blind to details that evening. To him there was a throng of people who had just seen her and heard her voice. There was light and colour, and confused mankind. Suddenly from the confusion a face separated itself—a face painfully distinct—the face of Katharine Adare. She was in a box on the pit tier, with a great lady to guard her, and two young men in attendance; but Irvine saw only her face. It was a night of wonders—a night throbbing with possibilities of passion, mysterious, wherein events move quickly—a drama and a lifetime. Two girls were under one roof, so near and so far apart—in one room, and of two worlds. It was impossible. It was the dream of a summer

night. If he looked, it would vanish away. He sat very still, and shaded his eyes with his hand. The curtain rose slowly, and he looked again. It was the great act for the *prima donna*. Irvine was half surprised to see the same face still—to hear the well-known voice singing pure and true. She looked childlike on the stage. She seemed artless but confident as a favourite child, with the heart of a woman and the enthusiasm of an artist. Stolid Britons smiled as they found themselves swayed by this innocent empress. Then they forgot to smile. It was as if a nightingale had found in the midst of her song a human heart, and the hearers of the bird stood smitten with sudden awe before unsuspected depths in themselves. There was a storm of applause as the great scene ended—such a roar of delight and affection as is heard from Englishmen alone when they forget to check their feelings. No man waited for his neighbour or feared to be conspicuous. It was overwhelming. Irvine turned pale and clutched the arms of his chair. He was swept away by her triumph. He was like a man alone far out to sea, hurled on by the tempest. Above him was a single star, on which his gaze was fixed. Slowly it changed before his eyes, and with no loss of brightness; it was a human face—

the face of Katharine Adare. A sudden terror seized the dreamer. He thought that he was going mad. His head was on fire and his pulses were throbbing. He got up suddenly and passed quickly out of the theatre into the outer air. The night was close and sultry. London had become suddenly insupportable. He remembered the river-side village of Sunleigh with a sharp sense of contrast. By the river he would be cool and calm again. Truly, the imp of restlessness, who had haunted this youth from his cradle, had sprung on a sudden into a full-sized demon. He could not stay. He might yet catch the last train to Sunleigh. He dashed at a hansom. He sprang up the stairs of his hotel, hastily filled a bag, scrawled his address on a piece of paper, and sped down again to the hall.

"Send my things after me to-morrow," he said, thrusting his address and some money into the hand of the porter; "and the bill. I can't stop now. I must catch the train."

"I'll attend to it, sir," said the porter, who was accustomed to eccentric departures; and added, "There has been a gentleman to see you, as said he'd call again, Mr Harefel."

Irvine only half heard the name as he ordered his cabman to drive quick.

A few minutes later Ned Harefel returned to the hotel, and asked if his cousin had come in. He was alarmed by his departure. He dared not think what Irvine Dale might do under a sudden impulse.

"He looked uncommon wild," said the porter, whose monotonous duties were relieved by little excitement.

"Is there a train to-night for Sunleigh?" asked Harefel.

"Twelve o'clock. You might catch it," said the porter, briefly.

Ned glanced at the clock, made a rapid calculation, and dashed out of the hotel. He reached the station just in time to spring into a carriage as the train began to move. He saw a pair of burning eyes fastened on his face, and knew that he was alone with Irvine Dale for the first time since their bitter parting on the terrace by the river.

CHAPTER XXI.

TUESDAY.

IN a pleasant room above a quiet street were Mr Sebastian Archer and his daughter. The windows were open, and the morning sunlight came in bright but not glaring. Breakfast had been cleared away; and the gentleman, placed in the easiest chair where he could catch a glimpse of cool green trees, was smoking an exquisite cigar. The Manetti was busy. She had suddenly remembered a neglected duty, and was washing the delicate china which her father loved. Sebastian was a very Don Giovanni of expensive tastes.

"I did better last night, *padre?*" said Miss Marion, careful over the bowl.

"You were good," said her father, slowly: "you sang with more heart." He took out his cigar, dropped the ash into an old Dresden saucer which

stood at his elbow, and added, softly, "Irvine Dale was there."

"I saw him," said she, as she stooped over a choice piece. "It is very strange, *padre*."

"What is strange, Bellina?"

"I was thinking of him in the overture—I don't know why—and when I went on, I saw him first of all; and I think I knew that I should see him."

"You think," said Mr Archer, drily; and added, after a pause, "He looked uncommonly wild."

"You saw it too? I was quite frightened for him. Mr Kerisen promised to find him. Where is Mr Kerisen? why is he not here?" She spoke sharply, and with that abruptness and slight foreign accent which often came when she was moved.

Her father smiled. "You task our poor Kerisen," he said. "Will he bring Dale here?"

"No, no," she answered, quickly; "he must not come till I am perfect in Lisa. He helps me to sing, but he would hinder my study."

"As you wish, Carina," murmured Sebastian, with lips more seriously busy with his cigar. "Poor Irvie! you should have tamed him to your hand at Amalfi, my little one."

"What should I have been now?" she asked, dreamily. "I have done something. I can do something. Can't I, *padre mio*?" She came to him, and passed her hand over the silky hair, in which few silver threads were visible.

"You can support a useless old father," he answered, looking up with smiling eyes.

She bent down and kissed his forehead. She seemed in need of affection that morning. "But the people?" she said; "I help them, do I not? I sing true? It is good as far as it goes?" She asked the questions eagerly, with the simplicity of a child, but did not wait for the answers. Indeed the questions were answered before asked, and she went back to her china. Presently a quick step was heard on the stairs, and Kerisen entered with an unusual air of animation. He went straight to Miss Marion, who had paused in her work, and was regarding him with little head in air and expectation in her eyes. The sleeve of her print frock was carefully pinned back, and the fingers, with rosy tips bent slightly backward, had been just dried on her big rough apron. Kerisen noted for the thousandth time with fresh surprise the beauty of the expressive hand, over which he bowed with half-serious deference, and the lovely

moulding of the wrist. "Gretchen," he murmured apologetically, to this most artistic housewife.

"Gallio converted," muttered Sebastian, smiling on his cigar.

"Have you found him?" asked the lady, with something imperious in her manner.

"I know where he is," said Kerisen. "Having received my orders from the most triumphant lady of the world——"

"No, no," said she, checking a smile.

"I went," he continued, "on the wings of the wind, or rather in a hansom, to Sir Joseph Harefel's. There they knew nothing of our friend Irvine. I then tried three likely hotels, without success. It was now past midnight; my cabman began to doubt my sanity; but I was afraid to give up the search. I was afraid to face your majesty. Suddenly I remembered an old-fashioned house which the wild youth affected. I went there; found a night-porter three parts asleep, and for the rest speechless with sulks and whisky. He pushed a paper at me when I asked for Dale. On it was scrawled an address in his handwriting. 'He went by the twelve o'clock,' grunted the porter. I copied the address, and here it is."

She thanked him warmly. "But what is this place?" she asked, holding the paper.

"The place is Sunleigh-on-Thames, a charming village. The house is kept by a good woman, who knows Irvine, and will take care of him. The air is a tonic; there is no noise."

She nodded her head at each item of the description, and, when it was ended, she stood looking meditatively at the paper. Mr Sebastian Archer regarded his daughter with unobtrusive attention. Then he crossed his legs, deposited the stump of his cigar in the Dresden saucer, assumed a position even more comfortable, and hazarded a proposition: "Let us take a holiday, and pay a visit to this enchanting village. I need some fresh air. We might look in on poor Irvine, and see if all goes well. What say you, little one? and you, Great Indifferent, who don't even deign to recognise my existence?"

"I beg your pardon," said Kerisen, coming forward with an embarrassed laugh. Then he looked to Miss Archer for an answer. There was certainly a change in the Great Indifferent. There was even a trace of anxiety in his look. His absolute serenity was impaired, for he had found a purpose in life.

Marion considered the question. "I sing on Thursday," she said; "I cannot go before. We will go on Friday to this Sunleigh. He should not be left alone."

"You are right," said Kerisen, gravely.

"You will come with us?" she asked.

He paused a moment before he answered, "If you wish it."

"Thank you," said she, with equal gravity.

"And he won't disturb your study?" asked her father, with a half smile.

"It does not matter; we must go," she said.

"*Varium et mutabile semper*," murmured Sebastian to his second cigar.

"On Friday, then?" asked Kerisen.

"Friday," said she, "and thank you." She held out her hand to him again.

"You may depend on me," he said, with all the meaning which he could put into the words.

When he had gone, Miss Archer remarked that he was not as cynical as he pretended to be. The wise parent only answered by a smile, enjoying, as he alone could enjoy, the observation of life and character. The talented daughter put away idle thoughts, and gave all her attention to the careful drying of a most delicate cup.

On the afternoon of the same day, as Miss Katharine Adare was reading by the open window, the footman announced Mr Edward Harefel. The young lady jumped up in spite of the heat, and went forward with outstretched hand. "When did you get back? I am glad," she began, and stopped abruptly. Was this the effect of foreign travel? The eyes which were wont to look so clearly and cheerfully on the world, stared at her from the midst of dark circles. "What is it?" she asked, and her voice sounded strange to her.

"I have come from Irvine," he began, quickly. "I have come to you; don't say that it is no business of yours." He spoke pleadingly, and his eyes, full of eager inquiry, never left her face.

"What is it?" she asked again, in a voice so low, that he knew only by the motion of her lips that she had spoken. She was filled with a great dread. She remembered the day when she had sent Ned Harefel away, and declared that Irvine's love affairs were of no consequence to her. It had never been true. She remembered how bitter her feelings had seemed to her then, when she spoke so lightly. What would she not give for that bitterness now, when she feared that the time for reconciliation had gone for ever! Among many

broken, flying thoughts, these were terribly clear. Out of her woman's heart came an inarticulate cry—"I should have borne with him. I could have helped him. It is my fault." A few minutes had gone since Ned had entered the room, and the sunlight was quenched, the world was changed. She condemned herself wholly with the sublime unreason of her sex. Would Ned never speak? An age was passing, and he stood staring at her with those awe-inspiring eyes. She felt a great thrill of relief and thankfulness when he said, "Irvine is very ill." She sat down and looked to him for more. He told her, forcing himself to speak calmly and in order, of his return to England, his fruitless journey to Oxford, his inquiries at the hotel, his pursuit to the railway station. "I can't speak of that railway journey," he said, and she saw him tremble. This calm sensible man was not easily moved.

"Poor Ned," she said, tenderly, and laid her hand upon his arm. He seemed to tremble anew under her touch. He had assigned himself a duty, and he feared that she would make it too hard.

"Don't think of me," he said, almost fiercely; "it is he whom we must think of. We ought not to have left him alone."

She was almost glad of his blame. She was already busy with plans of atonement. "Has he a good doctor?" she asked; "and a good nurse?"

"The woman of the house is an excellent nurse. There is a doctor with him, and my mother's doctor will go down this evening with me."

"And your mother?" she asked.

"I have not told her yet." As he said this, there flashed back upon them both the picture of that country drawing-room where she had rebuked him for bringing Irvine's letter to her before he had shown it to Lady Harefel. They were both silent for a moment, but he could not wait. He felt that he must finish the task which he had given himself to do. "My mother would go to him, of course, but she is nursing my father; he has overworked himself on committees, and London does not agree with him. It is nothing serious, but he can't bear her to leave him when he is ill: it might make him worse, and her too." Here he paused for a minute. "Katharine," he continued, more solemnly, "poor Irvie is delirious. If you could only hear him. He talks all the time, and every now and then he cries out as if for help, and it is always for you. If you could only hear him."

"I will go to him," she said, quietly, as if she

had waited for this ; and she rose as if to go at once.

“Stop,” he said, and she obeyed the unusual authority in his voice. “You must think what you do. I hope, I believe that he will get well, and then—— Katharine, you know that you cannot go away now without people talking. You must think what they will say. He is nothing to you in the eyes of the world. If you go, it will be like a promise—— Katharine, you don’t know how he loves you. If you could only hear him.” His voice was broken, and his words confused, but she understood him. He took her hand in his, and looked at her eagerly. He was pleading another’s cause as if it were his own.

“I will go to him,” she said, simply ; and they stood silent, hand in hand, like two children, and a great peace was with them, for all their trouble. She was the first to remember that the details of the plan must be arranged. She was glad to have something to do. “I must have somebody with me,” she said, with a faint smile. “I can persuade mamma that I am right ; but she is hard to move in a hurry, and can’t do without a maid. I have it. How lucky it is ! Your aunt Susan has been with us since Sir Joseph was taken ill.”

"Aunt Susan!" exclaimed the young man, with a slight flavour of contempt in his tone.

"Don't you see," said she—and even at that time there was room for a moment's amusement at the slow pace of man's mental processes,—“don't you see that she is the very person? She is his aunt, and a proper guardian for me, and will not try to interfere with our arrangements; and she will be delighted with the suddenness and strangeness—the romance.” There was something pitiful in the sound of this last poor word, which means so much or so very little. Katharine's eyes filled with tears, but she passed her hand over them, and turned with brave determination to practical matters. It was quickly arranged that Ned should call for her and Miss Harefel, and take them down to Sunleigh that evening. When he had gone, Katharine set to work to gain her mother's consent. Mrs Adare was confused and astonished, but offered a feeble resistance to her daughter's energy. She consoled herself by the thought that she had always expected it. She said again, as she often said, that her girl might do better. “Poor Irvie,” she remarked, after a pause of contemplation, “I have always been very fond of him. He is so unlike other young men; and” (more cheerfully), “after all, he may not get

over it." Katharine looked at her mother with sudden pain, but said nothing, for she knew that the absent lady was not aware that she had spoken. "It settles one thing," said Mrs Adare, presently, "I certainly need not go to Mrs Pegge Moyser's dance this evening. She can't expect me without my daughter. So I am committed to nothing." And with this comfortable thought, she rearranged herself among her cushions. Katharine's other task was far easier. Miss Susan Harefel was enchanted to such a degree, that she could scarcely feel the proper grief for Irvine's danger. "It is like the good old times," she said, kindling, "when two ladies——" Here she broke off, and it may be suspected that she was struggling with confused reminiscences of romantic-historical fiction. The young knight had fallen after many combats, and the ladies must go forth to succour him. She was sure that they would succeed. She used the word "quest." She was in an exalted mood. Katharine looked to the packing, and to the accumulation of certain things which might be good for the sick man. She dared not be idle.

CHAPTER XXII.

FRIDAY.

Is it the union of repose and motion which makes a river so satisfactory? We watch the sea fascinated but anxious, for we know that the storm must come. We muse by the lake, till its monotony has made us dull. The river is always there, and is always passing, full of movement and rest, change without violence, progress without revolution, pleasant as the touch of a loving hand which soothes a tired man to sleep.

On a most lovely morning Mr Sebastian Archer and his accomplished daughter, accompanied by Mr Kerisen, who had but lately taken to early hours, got out of the train at the little station of Sunleigh. It is a pleasant spot. A small cheerful house, with green blinds; a small garden by the line, with gay old-fashioned flowers and sweet

lavender; a small cock, agreeably conscious of his importance, and strutting while his two fat hen housewives more wisely scratched and ate. Besides these little things, there was the name of the station boldly and beautifully writ large in flints. A pleasant impression is given by places where the very officials unbend to flowers and art. Life must be less hurried here. Sunleigh in the morning light was healthy and happy in the eyes of the lady to whom flowers came most often in the shape of missiles, formal as the rapture of a *claque*, falling with a bump like turnips, scentless as the admiration of *habitués*. She thought that her voice would sound clearer after a breath of this balmy air. She sprang gaily into the local fly, nodded a good-bye to the gentlemen, who chose to walk, and so was driven away. A slight graceful girl in well-fitting gown, she sat upright, with her hands lying idle in her lap, recalling a familiar bit of music, smiling involuntarily at the meadows and tangled hedges, glad of all the rest and sweetness for herself and for Irvine Dale. She crossed a strip of common where the gorse was all ablaze, down a shady lane all glimmering under the beeches, and on a sudden she saw the Thames. She gave a low cry of delight. It was a revelation to her, who only

knew the river business-like and dignified by its fine embankment. She had watched the tide surge turbid and yellow against the stone steps, the brown barges drifting up, and the deep London cloud torn and flying; and at evening had stopped to see the lights spring up along the edge, across the bridge, and high up round as a moon in the clock-tower at Westminster. But this stream lazily lapping its banks, swaying the murmurous reeds and lifting the little grasses, could not be the same Thames. It had time for such trifling matters, and was so rich in leisure that it could spread itself in the sun, curve back to catch the light again, ruffle itself to break the rays for fun. There is no hurry, no hurry, it seemed to say, and the summer was longer on its banks.

Miss Marion awoke from a trance as the fly pulled up before a porch modestly gay with sweet-brier. It was the front of a cottage, but the cottage had grown along its trim lawn for the accommodation of jealous patrons. The young lady stepped lightly down and pulled the bell, not a whit embarrassed by the thought of asking for a young man. She was too apt to forget the small conventionalities. After a short time the door was opened, and there appeared on the threshold an-

other young lady. The two girls looked at each other with wonder.

"We heard that Mr Dale was staying here."

"Yes, he is here; but I am afraid you can't see him. He is ill." Then continued Miss Katharine, relenting, "Won't you come in?" and then, with a slight disdain, as the visitor hesitated, "There is no danger."

"I am not afraid," said Miss Marion, quickly. "I came with my father, who is walking from the station. He heard that Mr Dale was ill, and he—that is, we wished to see if we could do any good." There was a trace of defiance in her speech.

"Won't you come in?"

"Thank you; you are very good: I will come in, and wait for my father."

When the two girls were seated in the pleasant room, which opens wide on to the lawn sloping to the quiet river, there was a time of awkward silence.

"Is Mr Dale very ill?" asked Marion, studiously limiting the amount of interest in the question.

"I think he is better to-day. He has been very feverish and delirious. He has everything, I think,

which he wants. His aunt, Miss Harefel, is here, and we have got a good nurse."

"A nurse!"

Katharine fancied an accent of reproach. Who was this critical young lady? she wondered. "We do all we can," she said, and she felt how little it was; "but we have not practice. One can't do anything well without practice."

"That is true." The words leapt out as Miss Archer recognised her pet belief. "You think it strange of us to come," she went on, quickly; "we knew your—your cousin abroad."

"He is no relation," said truthful Katharine, "only a very old friend. I am here with his aunt, Miss Harefel."

"Ah! that is the aunt of Mr Edward Harefel too. Has he come back to England? Is he not here to take care of his cousin?"

"He has just come back. It was he who told us of poor Irvine's illness." Her thoughts went back to a familiar groove. What would come of her obedience to Ned's summons? Surely she was right to come, for Irvine had need of her. He loved her, and she had been hard to him. Did she love him? Had she always loved him? There was no use thinking foolish thoughts when he lay

dying. If she could only do more for him! What was the world saying? "Where is Miss Adare? She is nursing a young man who is very ill. Then they are engaged? Oh yes, a very old affair." She must not think of consequences. She must help him to live. Out of this prying world came the self-contained young lady with the strange eyes. She was no doubt forming her conclusions. Who was she? So Miss Katharine's thoughts came round once more to her guest, and she looked at her again. As she looked, a sudden wonder came upon her. She rose from her chair, and went forward with lips apart. "Mdlle. Manetti," she exclaimed, "I beg your pardon! Please forgive me, but surely you are Mdlle. Manetti?"

"I sing under that name. It was my mother's name," answered the other, opening her grey eyes wider.

"Let me thank you, please. I was there on Monday, and heard you sing for the first time."

"You really thought it good?" asked Mdlle. Manetti, on her defence against compliment.

"I can't pretend to be a judge," said Katharine, drawing back, "but I thought I might thank you." There was unmistakable truth in her voice, and the singer was conquered.

"It is for me to thank you," she said, with a pretty air and a slight accent. "I like it best when other girls understand me. But you know I am so tired of sham compliments. They are like the hired bouquets and the horrible advertisements. It is hard to be an artist sometimes."

"Oh, but you must not say that: it is so great; you have such power; you speak straight to people's hearts, and make us all love you." Katharine stopped and blushed, surprised at her own warmth, and fearful of being too forward; but Marion in her most Italian mood cried out, "You are good, and I like to hear this from you. Yes, it is true; we make many love us—a little:" then she paused and sighed, and added, with a childlike movement of the shoulders, "perhaps no one very much."

Reserve had now melted away, and the girls talked as friends.

At last Miss Archer declared that she would wait no more. "They must have lingered by the way," she said; "the *padre* is so fond of summer, and he is sometimes a little lazy, to tell the truth. You will make poor Mr Dale well—I am sure of it; will you not?"

"I will try."

Then they paused hand in hand, moved their heads doubtfully, prettily as two birds, and then by unspoken agreement kissed each other.

"You will come again?" asked Katharine.

"Thank you; I think not. We leave the poor patient in such good hands. Perhaps you will write to me. Will you?"

"May I? I should like to, so much. Will you leave your address? And you must write to me. I am Katharine Adare." She spoke the last words with another trace of defiance in her voice, as who would say, "I have nothing to hide."

"I knew it," said Marion, triumphantly; "he used to talk of you again and again. And you will write to me, then? I have written my address on this card—my home address—and you must write to my home name too. I am Marion Archer."

It was lucky for Miss Adare that she was standing with her back to the window. She turned away for a moment, as if looking for something, and moved as if uncertain where her feet would fall. Her thoughts were whirling. "Shall I break down?" she wondered. How stupid of me not to think of her! Of course she is no real Italian. She speaks English so well. I ought to have known. And how charming she is! I can see

her fascination. It is her wonderful eyes, her mysterious eyes." Her thoughts flew quickly. After a brief pause she turned again to her friend, with the colour once more in her cheeks, and her eyes full of tenderness. "You will come back again and see him when he is better," she said. "He will be so glad to see you."

"Perhaps; I can't say. I shall be very busy." The *prima donna* stood hesitating, awkward as a shy child, eager to say something more, but doubtful. Her sensitive, slim fingers quivered with excitement, and Katharine took them into her strong shapely hand with something of protection. Miss Archer began to speak quickly, as if she had only waited for this friendly touch. "No, I will not come again; it is better not. I am so glad to see you here. I always thought it when he used to speak of you; now I am sure. Ah, forgive me! but you are so good and so beautiful!"

Katharine blushed furiously at the Southern frankness of this tribute to her fair face. She was embarrassed. She could not let her visitor, of all people in the world, go away with a false notion. It was hard to speak, but her character imposed on her one law, which she could not break. She must be true. "You must not think,"

she began, with the blush still on her cheek, and hesitated. Then she set her blue eyes straight on the unfathomable eyes before her, and said, "I am here with poor Irvine's aunt, to help him if I can. That is all. We are very old friends and play-mates, he and I, and that is all."

"But it must not be all. Ah, forgive me! you English girls are so proud, and keep to yourselves. I am English too, and I know. But you will be kind to him, and gentle. You can cure him if you will. He is kind and good, but not very strong, and he needs you. He loves you—ah! I am sure that he loves you; I know it."

It was perhaps lucky that Mr Irvine Dale, however discontented with himself, did not hear himself described by a young girl as good but weak. When Katharine stooped and kissed her new friend again, she said to her own heart, with a kind of awe, that it was true, and that she was pledged. Marion was unusually pale, and her eyes were larger than ever, as she felt the kiss upon her cheek, and accepted its silent message. "You are right," she said, quickly, and turned to go.

Not far from the house the fly stopped short. Miss Archer looked, and beheld her father stretched at full length on a patch of green by the wayside.

"A sweet spot," he said, lazily gathering himself together.

Kerisen rose quickly from a neighbouring heap of stones, and came to the side of the carriage. "Did you not find him?" he asked, as he tried to read her face.

"He is there," she answered, "but I did not see him. He is doing well, they say. His people are with him. They were very kind; and they will write to me."

Kerisen saw that further questions would not please her. He had become strangely observant of her moods. "Come," said he to Sebastian, who had by this time risen, "our inquiries are over. The day is before us. What shall we do?"

"We will get to Richmond somehow," answered Mr Archer—"dear Cockney Richmond. We have an endless summer day; and there is the river, the park, the view, and a tolerable dinner. Will that do, my little one?"

"Whatever you like, *padre mio*," she said; and Kerisen, looking at her, thought that he had never heard her voice so gentle nor seen her face so fair.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ON THE RIVER.

IRVINE did not die. The fevered body grew daily cooler, and the hot brain saner. It was a wonderful summer for England, and the early days of August made all men rest who could, and even all women. Lured partly by the thought of running water, partly by pity for the sick man, Mr Dale's friends gathered around him. Mrs Adare, enjoying the heat, and clad in the freshest of gowns, came from town, and carried her daughter across the road to the inn. It seemed better that the patient, now capable of recognition, should not be surprised by the presence of any lady more distracting than his nurse. So Ned Harefel succeeded Katharine at the cottage; and it was Ned's hand which felt the first friendly pressure of Irvine's wasted fingers. Sir Joseph, who had sat up very

late, grown very hot, and cried "Hear, hear!" and "Oh, oh!" and made other important exclamations throughout a trying session, had been nursed back to his normal bloom by a devoted wife, and recommended complete repose after his severe parliamentary labours. So he took a house some two miles below Sunleigh, and thence the worthy baronet would come solemnly sculling against the stream, brooding once more over the great French Egg question, gaining an appetite for dinner, and showing a proper interest, as he hoped that he had never failed to do, in his eccentric nephew. "*Mens sana in corpore sano*," he observed more than once; and, indeed, no man of saner mind may be found on any of the senatorial benches. As for his dear good wife, the hot weather induced an amount of sleep which left but short time for her numerous housewifely duties. Nevertheless not a day went by on which her sleek horses did not bear her, asleep or awake, to the startled village of Sunleigh. For her the little rustic girls drew up short in their running, and bobbed as if dipping in the sea, while ruder little boys dashed through the dust with shouting. She, good lady, beamed on all alike, musing on some new comfort for the poor invalid, or considering how best to introduce to the doctor

her grandmother's infallible receipt for restoring the strength. She had a mingled admiration and contempt for the profession—consulting them and disobeying their orders, delighting in their conversation, quoting now one and now another as suited her theory of the moment, and summoning them all at intervals to be judged by the secret MS. book in which her lamented grandmother had inscribed her receipts for curing the parish of all ills,—that grandmother, a mighty mistress of herbs, and revered as a witch by the infant imagination of her village. So Irvine opened his seeing eyes among friends, and an atmosphere of kindliness was about him, with the soft air of summer.

It was a breathless afternoon, save for that slight stir of air which on the stillest day moves on the moving river. Shaded by a large white umbrella, Irvine lay languid among the cushions as the boat glided on. The fulness of the time was in his heart; he sighed in his weakness, and his eyes filled with tears. Ned Harefel, sculling with long steady strokes, felt almost ashamed of his own strength as he looked at his friend. The old half-forgotten tenderness came back, with many memories. He looked back to the friendship of long ago, enshrined in a dim vision of works and days,

dull-red buildings and majestic elms. He forgot cold slight and fierce speech—the comrade who would give nothing but companionship in pain. He forgot Katharine Adare. His friend and brother had come back to him from death, and from bitterness worse than death. The time of trouble was blotted out. They were boys once more. Ned was not given to sentimental speech, but he felt obliged to say something. “It’s as if we were coming down from Monkey,” he said.

“Let us go back to that,” said Irvine, quickly, in his faint voice; and added, after a pause, “what a brute I have been to you ever since!”

“Oh no,” answered the other, and had no more to say.

Gliding on together, seeming to pass once more through scenes of happy boyhood, these two young Englishmen were full of deep and tender feeling, but not quick to speak. The young Briton ranks next to the good dog in pathetic inability to express emotion. Irvine, who sometimes had an unusual flow of words, was silent now, and only looked his thanks. Ned muttered something, which may have been, “Poor old man!” or “Dear old boy!” and betook himself to his sculling.

“It is good to be alive,” said Irvine, after a

long pause of enjoyment; "but I don't deserve it."

"We could not spare you," said Ned, with a strange kind of gruffness.

"And why not, in heaven's name?" cried his cousin, quickly, and raising himself on his elbow. "I wonder you didn't strangle me! I've brought you nothing but trouble—trouble to you all. I've been abominably selfish and weak. I've made an ass of myself; scolding the world because it wasn't made for my pleasure; asking everything and giving nothing——" Here he stopped for breath, and sank back among the cushions with the final remark, "I don't deserve to live." To this declaration the oarsman wisely made no answer, but continued his work with due solemnity. Presently Irvine spoke again in a quiet tone. "I will deserve it," he said. He lay looking far away into the calm deeps of heaven, very weak in body, unconscious of the tears which filled his eyes, with his heart full of praise and thankfulness.

As Edward Harefel drove the boat steadily onward, he was busy with a thought which had troubled him for some time. He had waited day after day, hoping and fearing, till it should please his cousin to speak of Katharine. He had heard

him cry to her in his delirium, but he had not heard her name from his sane lips since the day when he had been smitten by those cruel words, "You love her." So, for all their renewed brotherhood, there was an awkwardness ever between them. Each was again and again possessed by one thought, guessing the other's thought, and suspecting that the other guessed his. Such uneasy relations between friends must find relief in words, or they poison companionship. The time had come when Katharine's name must be spoken. Now, when Irvine was able to leave the house, he might see her at any moment. He must be prepared for the meeting. With a sick fear that a new quarrel might come between them, Ned stopped rowing, and asked abruptly, "Do you know that Katharine is at the inn?" As he spoke, he looked down into the water, fearing his friend's face. As no answer came, he went on as calmly as he could, "You ought to know what she has done. I am afraid she would not like me to speak, but I see no other way. She came here with aunt Susan, when you were first ill, because—because you kept calling for her to save your life. I told her, and she came at once. She did not care for what people might say. She quieted

you when nobody else could. I sometimes think that she saved you." It was hard for Ned to say so much. He delivered himself of all which he had to say in a somewhat jerky manner, and began his mechanical work once more.

"I thought it was a dream," said Irvine, softly; and added, with a sigh, "she was wrong to do so much for me."

"She was right, as she always is," cried the other, warmly.

"You always trusted her," said Irvine, sadly.

"I've something else to say," said Ned, and he stopped his hands again. "You once said to me—but you remember all that. You said I loved her. When you said it, I could not answer. I was dazed; I did not know. For a moment I thought you were right. I knew that you were much cleverer. I thought that you had seen in me what I did not know myself. I knew that I had always thought her the first woman in the world—that she was the best, and wisest, and most beautiful; but you know all that. I only want to say that you were wrong. You were wrong, you know. I've been away, and I've been thinking about it; and I know now that I don't love her in that way: and that's all. I thought

it best to make a clean breast of it; and that's all I had to say." As he drove the boat forward once more, Irvine Dale lay still among the cushions, thinking. His heart had almost stopped beating at the first sound of her name. Now, with eyes half closed, he was forcing himself to think of his own unworthiness—of the harm done by weakness. He told himself that he would not hope, and he hoped. He told himself that a proved craven should not dare to purpose, and his purpose was formed. "Come what may, I will do something and expect nothing," he said to himself. If he were ever worthy—but he would not think of that. He would work, and be humble. But Ned did not love her. What a weight had been lifted from him by that knowledge! So he lay thinking, and was very tired, when the boat was laid cleverly along the edge of the lawn. Ned almost lifted him out, drew his arm across one stalwart shoulder, and half carried him into the house. Restored to his sofa, Irvine held his cousin's hand a moment. "You have made me very happy," he said. "I don't deserve to hope, but—you have made me very happy." Ned pressed the thin, tremulous fingers, and looked down frankly into the plaintive eyes, but he said nothing. He went out into the

road, and looked across at the village inn. Then he turned sharply away, buttoned his pilot-coat over his flannel shirt, and set out for a walk. There were signs of unusual emotion about this quiet young gentleman. He walked faster and faster, breathing hard. He left the village behind him, and went striding up a steep lane. It was an hour of intense repose. He hated secrets, and felt a hot desire to break this insufferable stillness. As he sped along, the burning words leapt out. "It was a lie!" he cried—"a lie! I loved her." Thus he made his confession in the pure air of heaven, perhaps not a complete confession, when he said, "I loved her." Complete confessions, if not impossible, would be very long. "I loved her," said Edward Harefel, and set about making the words true. He was not one to nurse a weakness; to spend time in self-pity; to fold his cloak about him and sit crying over spilt milk. He understood the simple soul who took his half-loaf with gratitude; but he had small patience for the Manfred of the milk-pail. On he went, tramping along and wrestling with himself, as he hoped, for the last time. At last he came striding homeward, tired, calm, and, it must be confessed, hungry. He had won the final victory of a long and hard campaign.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN END AND A BEGINNING.

It was a morning full of promise and sweet air. It seemed as if the sun had been reconciled to England once more. He had breathed away the early mists from the river, and made its surface tremulous with laughter. The year, now old enough to be staid and placid, capriciously renewed its youth and the first wonder of summer. Irvine, who grew stronger daily, was already propped and pillowed on the lawn, imbibing health. Close beside him sat Ned, cross-legged, weaving a net. Kerisen leaned his back against the big lime, and smoked his after-breakfast cigar. Leonard Aubrey, all white flannel from head to foot, had flung himself on the warm grass by Irvine's feet—Leonard, the embodiment of easy mirth, laughing with the laughter of the running stream. Talk came lazily, and in fragments.

"They go to-morrow," said Kerisen, moodily, in answer to a question. "They will come again in spring, like other good things."

Irvine quoted dreamily—

"But green leaves, and blossoms, and sunny warm weather,
And singing, and loving—all come back together."

"More singing than loving," muttered Kerisen, curtly, and tossed the rest of his cigar into the river. After a pause he looked round upon his friends with a droll expression, and made this dismal confession: "She said yesterday, that when she had reached her best, she should marry a first-rate accompanist."

"What were you talking about when she said that?" asked Ned, sagely.

"Oh, I make no secret of my feelings."

"No, that you don't," cried Leonard Aubrey, laughing.

"I shall win some day, when I have served my seven years or more. Better to wait a lifetime for her than look at any other woman."

"He makes no secret of his feelings," observed the mocker from the grass. "Indeed he does not. He whispers his hope to the stage-carpenter and the call-boy. The printer's devil who waits for those invaluable articles, has demanded a higher

salary for listening over time to Mr Kerisen's confidences. Contributions are daily returned to him with the request that he will remove the eulogies of a *prima donna* from his papers on political economy and foreign policy. My boy, how are you translated! To think of you caring for political economy, aware of the existence of politics, and in love!"

Kerisen looked down at him with contempt. "Trifler," he said.

"Pluck up a spirit," said Leonard, lying flat on his back, "and come round the world with me."

"Round the world!" exclaimed Ned, who was kept in a perpetual state of surprise.

"Why not? It's a very little one."

"When did you make up your mind to that?"

"A minute ago. It's a mind easily made up. I saw a bird, and the thought came to me."

"But what shall you do?" asked the practical Mr Harefel again.

"Sketch. On mornings like this I feel the painter. I shall sketch the world. I am off. I have had too much Oxford; I need a change. It's a duty."

They all laughed, but the traveller looked up wisely at Kerisen, and said, "You had better come.

It will cure you, or make her fear that it will cure you. Trust me, she doesn't want you to hop too far from her hand. She'll soon be sighing for a falconer's voice."

"No, no," said Kerisen, with a fine air of determination. "I stay at home, and drudge, and wait. I shall drive the pen for my weekly and my monthly. When I think of how she works, I am ashamed of myself. Don't tempt me. I am a reformed man." He ceased, and perceiving the inextinguishable laughter of Leonard Aubrey, tossed a small twig at him and hit him on the nose.

"An industrious apprentice of the name of Gallio," said Leonard, in revenge.

Irvine Dale, who had reposed and listened to the small-talk of his friends, lifted up his left hand to Kerisen, and said, "Good-bye to Gallio, and success to Benedick."

Kerisen, holding the hand, which still looked white and delicate, bent down and whispered something.

Irvine blushed, and a look of indescribable happiness came into his face. He could hardly believe his fortune. Ned turned his head and looked at Aubrey. "Are you really going round the world?" he asked.

"Of course. What else should I do?"

"Oh, nothing."

"I shall see life. I shall paint the Mikado of Japan. Who will round the world with me? Why," he continued, sitting up and staring about him, "we are like four fellows in a fairy tale, princes or millers' sons, or something. I shall send home a dog so small and of such excellent wisdom, that the Egyptian Hall shall be full for years, and a fortune be taken at the doors; or I shall find a wife so beautiful that I shall be made king of the country. My ladder of ropes shall be golden hair. But, after all, there is nothing like freedom. Thus runs the tale. So the four young men arose and embraced each other: and the first faced to the North, for he heard a sweet voice singing in the city of the Czar; and the second faced to the South, for his heart was full of love; and the third faced the East, for it was the only quarter disengaged; but the youngest, loveliest, and best was clad from top to toe in shining white, and he faced to the West——"

"And took the steamer to New York," said Kerisen, taking up the tale; "and he wandered on and on, until he came to a fair avenue, and he passed it by; and he came to a second avenue, and he passed it by; and likewise a third and a

fourth ; but when he came to the fifth avenue, there sat the King of the Railways, and beside him the princess his daughter, clad in a gown of Paris, exceeding fair, and she sat all day on sacks of silver. So the lily-white youth was wedded with great joy——”

“No, no,” cried Leonard ; “liberty before all things ! I won’t be rich and young too. But what of the oldest brother ? The oldest brother, who was an idle, clever, cynical dog, took ship and went a-sailing, until he came to an island of sweet singing ; and being too lazy to put wool in his ears, he was enraptured and enthralled, and the Siren handed him over to a cruel printer’s devil, and so he was lost.”

“Abrupt, slangy, and modern,” said Kerisen the critic.

“And the second brother ? What shall we say of you, Irvie ? Go round the world the other way, and meet me in the middle.”

“Pooh !” said Kerisen, “let him plunge into ink with me, and be industrious and happy.”

Ned, who was by nature distrustful of wild suggestions, looked somewhat anxiously at his cousin. “Better come back to Islay with me,” he said. “You might buy a place, and make friends with

your tenants and labourers, and see what they are fit for. And then, you know, you might stand for the county."

Irvine burst out laughing. "Give me a minute's rest," he said; "you forget that I am just out of a fever."

"Which?" asked Leonard, quickly; "the love-fever, or the thought-fever, or what?"

Irvine flushed hotly, and then laughed and answered, "I suppose I have never been out of a fever before."

"Nobody is nowadays," Kerisen observed, judicially; "the world's a whirl, and all the men and women feverish."

"Especially all the women," said Leonard.

"Not all," Ned answered, and looked towards the house. He was the first to see Miss Katharine step through the long window, bringing another plaid for Irvine.

"So," cried the privileged mocker, the youngest prince, "you break up the last meeting of friends."

"I hoped I was a friend too," she said.

"We will turn out Leonard," said Kerisen, "and elect you unanimously in his place."

"And are women capable of friendship?" asked Mr Aubrey, pertly.

"The best friend in the world," whispered Ned Harefel to his netting.

Irvine lay still and looked at Katharine as at some ministering angel. His love for her was associated with all his best aspirations. He could scarcely believe his fortune, but he would be worthy of it.

"Come," cried the impulsive Leonard, springing to his feet, "let us form a brotherhood, the brothers of St Katharine."

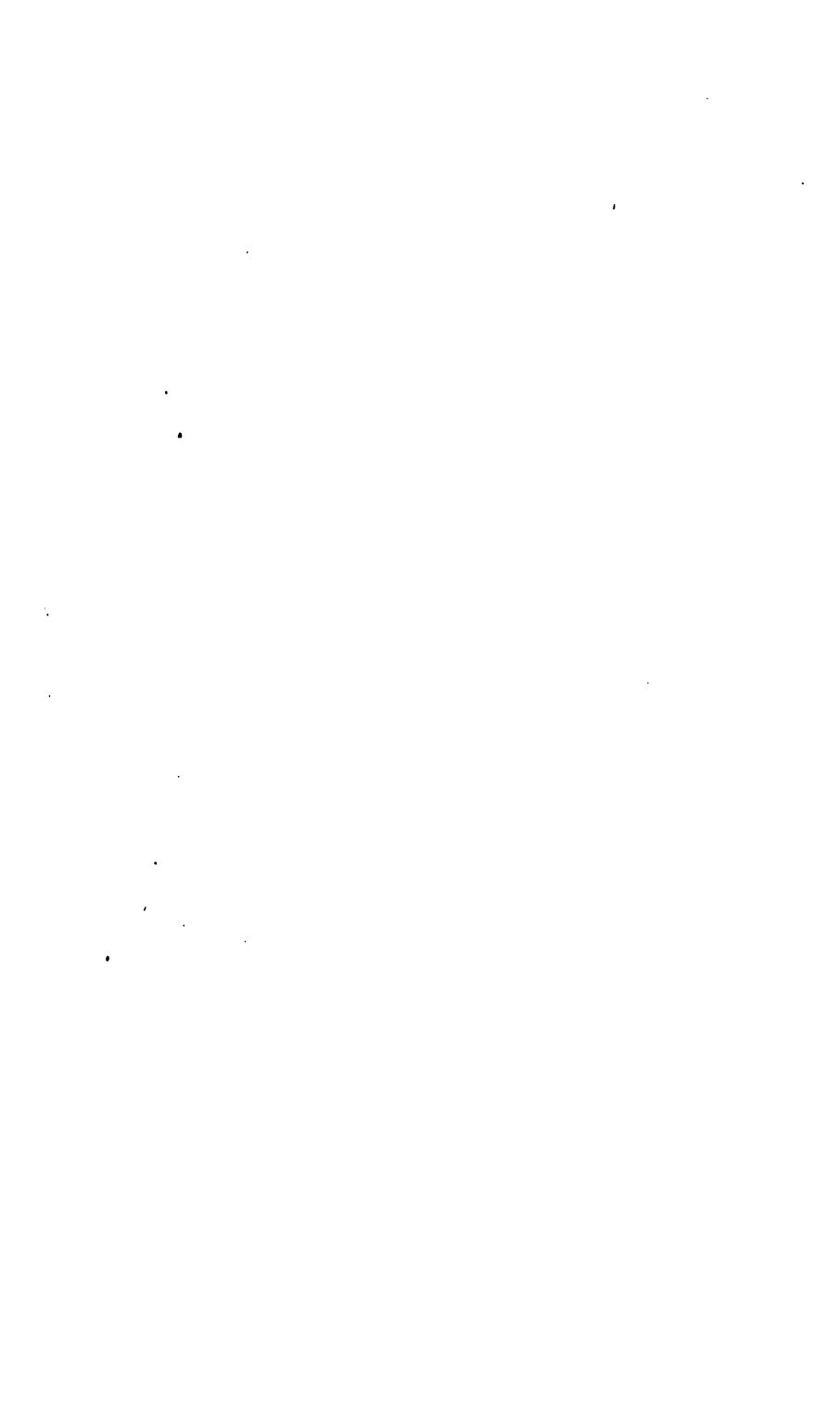
Kerisen scoffed, and the wayward enthusiast was at last reduced to silence, but not for long. "Miss Adare," he began again, "we were asking what Irvine meant to do. What is he to be?"

She was kneeling by his side, and rearranging his cushions. "He is to get quite well," she answered. Irvine was trying to see her eyes, and she presently raised them to his, laughing, but blushing a little.

"And then?" asked the inquisitive Leonard.

She was still looking at Irvine, happy in his love and trust. He took her hand in his. "And then?" he asked with a smile—"and then?"

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